Diverse Excellencies: Jonathan Edwards on the Attributes of God

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Abstract

This thesis explores Jonathan Edwards's view of God's attributes in light of his Trinitarian theology. In particular, I argue that, contrary to the claims of some Edwards scholars, Edwards clearly affirms the doctrine of divine simplicity throughout his writings as it was held among the Reformed scholastics. Through an exposition of his *Discourse on the Trinity* in light of its historical and polemical context, I demonstrate both Edwards's orthodoxy and his distinct innovations in expressing the orthodox view of the Trinity. Notably, I show that Edwards distinguishes the persons of the Godhead by means of a strong psychological account of the Trinity positing that the only real distinctions in God are those of being, understanding, and will, which correspond to the three persons of the Godhead. Additionally, Edwards maintains the unity of the Godhead by appeal to divine simplicity, whereby "everything (real) in God is God." Finally, Edwards upholds the personhood of each person through the biblical doctrine of perichoresis. This exposition enables me to respond to a variety of criticism of Edwards's trinitarianism.

The second part of my thesis unfolds Edwards's attribute classification system as it proceeds from his trinitarianism and his account of the God-world relation. Edwards distributes attributes in two primary ways. First, he distributes attributes into real attributes, which simply are the persons of the Godhead, and modal or relative attributes, which are real attributes in relation to creation. Second, he distributes attributes into natural attributes and moral attributes, based on whether they are reducible to God's being and understanding on the one hand, or reducible to God's will on the other. Within relative attributes, I demonstrate further distinctions such as capacity attributes, which are sufficiencies in God to certain effects and which are relatively dormant until God wills to create, and negative attributes, which Edwards surprisingly includes within relative attributes on the basis of the fact that they deny some creaturely quality to God and thereby depend upon creation's existence for their intelligibility. I conclude by bringing Edwards's taxonomy of attributes to bear on the question of divine freedom and creation's necessity, showing that while Edwards does differ in some ways from his Reformed forebears, he does not hold, as some scholars claim, that God is essentially creative and that creation is necessary. Rather, Edwards employs the category of "fitness" to describe God's acts of communicating his glory and the employment of creation as a means to that end.

Candidate's Declaration

I, Joseph James Rigney, hereby certify that the material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

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Signature Date

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INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of God and creation is contested. He has been called an Augustinian, a Neoplatonic emanationist, a Holy Spirit emanationist, an idealist, an immaterial anti-realist, an immaterial realist, a continual creationist, an occasionalist, a global theological determinist, a panentheist (of various varieties), and even a (borderline) pantheist. He is said to combine elements of both traditional theism and process theism, and he is said to be a fairly standard classical theist. He is said to have a psychological model of the Trinity, and he is said to offer a psychological model *and* a social model. He is said to deny divine simplicity, modify divine simplicity, find divine simplicity unintelligible, and clearly and unremarkably affirm divine simplicity. He is said to defend divine aseity, and he is said to effectively deny divine aseity. He is said to believe that God is essentially creative and that creation is necessary, and he is said to believe no such thing. Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of God and creation is indeed contested.

Recent attempts to classify the debates about Edwards's doctrine of God and creation divide scholars roughly into two streams.[1] The first is associated with the work of Princeton theologian Sang Hyun Lee and orients Edwards's theology by his innovative reconstruction of Reformed theology around a dispositional ontology. Scholars associated with the Lee school include Amy Plantinga Pauw, Michael McClymond, Gerald McDermott, and Anri Morimoto. Each of these scholars accept, to one degree or another, the centrality of dispositional ontology for Edwards's thought. The second school of thought (sometimes referred to as "the British

[1] See Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 3–6; Michael J. McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony: A Critique of Some Critics of Sang Lee's and Amy Pauw's Accounts of Jonathan Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 68–70; Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 18–20, 228–33.

school" since many of its practitioners were educated in British universities) has largely formed in response to the work of Lee and others. This loose collection of scholars, including Oliver Crisp, Kyle Strobel, Steven Studebaker, Paul Helm, and Stephen Holmes, regards Edwards as much more traditional than the former. Edwards's innovations, while real, are not nearly as pronounced as the Lee school suggests. In one sense, the divide is characterized by how radical and modern Edwards's innovations were. Does Edwards offer a "bold attempt at reconfiguring classical theological themes in an early modern key," rejecting or significantly revising such fundamental doctrines as divine simplicity, substance metaphysics, and the Western trinitarian tradition?[2] Or does he offer a milder recalibration of classical theology in light of early Enlightenment thought, a recalibration that leads to some unusual metaphysical conclusions but does not substantively alter the Reformed orthodox tradition of which Edwards was a part?

Overview of Scholarship on Edwards's Doctrines of God, Creation, and Attributes

In order to set the stage for an examination of Edwards's doctrine of God and his attributes, it will be helpful to briefly survey some of the work of these scholars, with a particular focus on their account of Edwards's theology proper, his view of the God-world relation, and his approach to divine attributes.

Sang Hyun Lee

Sang Hyun Lee's *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* is universally acknowledged as a seminal work in Edwards scholarship.[3] For Lee, Edwards's theology is

[2] See Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 5; Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 170.

[3] Bombaro identifies Lee's work as the origin of a "new perspective" on Edwards that "proposes a thoroughly modern foundation for his metaphysics." See John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 172 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 8.

"radically creative…a thoroughgoing metaphysical reconstruction, a reconception of the nature of reality itself."[4] According to Lee, Edwards departed from the classical understanding of substance metaphysics and replaced it with a more "dynamic" understanding which Lee dubs dispositional ontology, a novel conception which mediates "between being and becoming, permanence and process."[5] Lee contends that Edwards applied dispositional ontology to the divine being itself, offering a more dynamic account than traditional classical theism, one that encompasses both being and becoming.[6] In fact, Lee argues that Edwards's dispositional account of the divine being offers a mediating position between classical theism and process theology.[7] For Lee's Edwards, the divine essence is essentially a disposition, which finds full expression in the processions of the Son and Spirit.[8] However, because dispositions are not exhausted by their exercise, God is able to further exercise his dispositional essence externally in the creation of the world.[9] The world is thus "meant to be the spatio-temporal repetition of the prior actuality of the

[4] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 3.

[5] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 4, 47–75.

[6] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 14.

[7] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 5. While Lee offers Edwards as an alternative to process theology that stands between it and classical theism, his description of Edwards's view seems to essentially align with his account of the boundaries of process theology. "Process theology attempts to portray God's being as at once complete or eternal and also engaged in becoming by positing a dipolar, or two-sided, nature of the divine being. God's primordial or conceptual side…is changelessly complete, while God's consequent or concrete nature is an ongoing process of becoming" (5). On the next page, Lee describes Edwards's theology as introducing "dynamism into the very being of God without compromising God's prior actuality…God can be seen as fully actual and at the same time engaged in a process of self-extension." Lee's account of Edwards seems to evince the same dipolarity, thus raising the question of why Edwards's theology isn't a species of process theology on Lee's account.

[8] "The immanent Trinity is the eternal exertion of God's dispositional essence." Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 173. Lee posits a distinction in the eternal life of God between the Father as the primordial actuality of true beauty in himself, and the repetition of the Father's actuality in the Son and the Spirit. In fact, Lee offers a three step "movement" in the life of God. First, there is God in his *primordial beauty and actuality* as Father. Second, there is the Father's *eternal self-realization* in the processions of the Son and the Spirit, by which God knows and loves himself and which constitutes his internal fullness. Third, there is the *self-repetition* of God's internal fullness in time and space in the creation of the world and the communication of God's knowledge and love to creatures (See his discussion on 185–201).

[9] "God, conceived as essentially a disposition, is capable of being a perfect actuality *and* an eternal disposition to repeat this actuality through further exercises." Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 173. Lee suggests that Edwards offers a number of important qualifications to his account of God as disposition. "The divine disposition, unlike ordinary dispositions, is never without the primordial and eternal divine actuality, is unacquired and everlasting, is the absolutely beautiful and truly exercised disposition and thus capable of communicating being and

divine being, an everlasting process of God's self-enlargement of what he already is."[10] Indeed, God is "inherently creative, self-communicating, and even self-enlarging."[11]

The watchword for Lee's account of Edwards is "dynamic," which is what Edwards "introduces" to the otherwise "static" account of God offered in classical theism.[12] Moreover, this dynamism extends to nature and history, which are conceived as a system of dispositional powers actualized through creaturely perception and recognition of the temporal repetition of God's glory. "Through the activity of the sanctified imagination, the perceiving self and the perceived world attain their actuality."[13] For Lee, Edwards formulates this modern and dispositional view of God's being and reality in conversation with Locke, Newton, and Cambridge Platonists like Ralph Cudworth and Lord Shaftesbury.[14] Edwards appropriates and significantly modifies the received Aristotelian-Scholastic account of habit. Instead of being an accidental quality that inheres in a substance, an Edwardsean habit or disposition is "a lawlike relation between events or actions" which is an "ontologically real, abiding principle" standing between mere potentiality and full actuality.[15] In other words, habits actually constitute the permanence of being, as opposed to being properties of substantial forms or essences.[16]

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beauty through a communication of divine knowledge and love, and finally, is an absolutely self-moved disposition that creates even its own occasions for exercise" (183).

[10] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 6.

[11] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 63.

[12] "Edwards has made a basic modification of the traditional conception of the deity and has introduced an element of dynamic movement into the heart of the divine being" See Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 6. "What results from Edwards' recasting of Christian thought…is a novel and dynamic perspective on God, the world, and history" (8). The divine nature is "inherently dynamic," encompassing both being and becoming (14). "God's actuality, for Edwards is different from the actus purus as Saint Thomas conceived of it…The perfect actuality of Edwards' God is an eternal movement as well as an essential actuality…God's actuality, for Edwards…is a dynamic actuality, a dynamic fullness" (208–209)

[13] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 9.

[14] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 10–14.

[15] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 34–46.

[16] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 48–49.

Lee's dispositional ontology accounts for how Edwards can be a semi-occasionalist and an objective idealist. Because the world has a virtual mode of reality from moment to moment (which God actualizes with an immediate exercise of his power), Edwards cannot be classified as an unqualified occasionalist.[17] The virtual mode of reality also provides an element of realism to Edwards's idealism, since the world, in its virtual mode, exists apart "from either divine or human knowledge."[18] Finally, Lee sees Edwards as an enduring source of insight in modern philosophy and theology, one who offers a bold reshaping of our conceptions of reality and a bold reconception of the very nature of God.[19]

Michael McClymond

Beginning with his early treatments of Edwards, Michael McClymond describes Edwards as "an artful theologian,"[20] "modern, yet with a twist,"[21] an apologist "attempting to bridge the hiatus between distinctively Christian claims and the broader culture of the day."[22] Edwards was "deeply engaged with characteristically eighteenth-century intellectual issues—for example, empiricism, British moral philosophy, and the deistic controversy," appropriating and modifying entire intellectual traditions, making them subservient to his theological purposes.[23] Not content

[17] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 63.

[18] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 63–67.

[19] Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 170.

[20] Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards (Religion in America Series)*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. "Interpreted in its historical and cultural context, Edwards's religious thought was a brilliant exercise in 'artful theology,' and its artistry was shown most tellingly in his prodigious attempt to alter, reinterpret, and 'baptize' the intellectual traditions of the eighteenth century, to make them serve the Christian message as he understood it" (8).

[21] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 6.

[22] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 4.

[23] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 6. "Rather than starting from the accepted results of the various intellectual disciplines of his day, he delved back to their fundamental principles and sought to reconstruct the very disciplines themselves so as to make them congruent with Christian truth as he understood it" (7). As an example, according to McClymond, Edwards "used the British moral philosophy of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury to anthropomorphize and ethicize God, without however eliminating the Calvinist elements from his conception of God" (7).

to simply repeat the answers of his Reformed and Puritan forebears, he "entered into a creative engagement with the leading thinkers of his day in order to reconstruct historic Protestantism on an entirely new basis, corresponding to the empirical and ethical bent of post-Lockean English thought."[24] It is the "unparalleled combination of conservatism and innovation" that makes Edwards distinctive as a theologian.[25]

Edwards's theocentrism orients and links his ontology, his idealism, his aesthetics, and his view of causality.[26] His theocentric apologetics enable him to turn the tables on Enlightenment anthropocentrism. His ontology, which makes God "the measure of all things" and identifies God as Being in General and "the sum of all being," is designed to accentuate the distinction between God and creatures, not collapse it in pantheistic fashion.[27] His idealism is "a theocentric strategy of turning the tables on materialism."[28] His occasionalism is a "bold philosophical counterstroke" to "the mechanistic and materialistic threat to God's involvement in mundane reality."[29]

In his most recent work, McClymond places himself firmly in what he calls "the Lee-Pauw viewpoint" (as opposed to critics like Crisp, Holmes, and Studebaker), since it is "firmly

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[24] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 51.

[25] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 74.

[26] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 29.

[27] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 29, 31. McClymond approvingly quotes George Rupp as follows: "Edwards' contention that God is coextensive with all reality implies the corollary that whatever ontological status finite individuals may have is derivative from that divine reality." George Rupp, "The 'Idealism' of Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969): 214; McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 31.

[28] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 32. "God's consciousness constitutes the ground of all reality…This theocentric idealism differs from anthropocentric idealism (such as Kantianism) by locating an imperturbable basis for all acts of knowing outside of the human mind itself, in the terra firma of the divine being…Edwards's idealism is quite consistent with an objective approach to epistemology…Only because Edwards's epistemology is radically God-centered does he succeed in his peculiar combination of empiricism and idealism" (33).

[29] McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 35. By occasionalism, McClymond means "attributing all events to divine agency and denying that created agents are properly capable of producing effects on one another." "Edwards is entirely uncompromising in denying the causal self-sufficiency of the creature…He effectively denied any real involvement of creatures in the causal process."

supported by the primary texts" and makes the most sense of Edwards's "soteriologically-oriented doctrine of God and the Trinity."[30]

McClymond likens Edwards's theology to an orchestra containing five musical sections, all of which must be heard and attended to in order to appreciate the music.[31]

1) Trinitarian communication, which includes God's internal communication within the Trinity as well as Edwards's distinctive notion of beauty, which is the first of the divine perfections.
2) creaturely participation, which is central to Edwards's soteriology and by which creatures voluntarily and joyfully partake of God's beauty.
3) necessitarian dispositionalism, which includes the reconception of being in dispositional terms, rendering reality dynamic, as well as the necessary link between our strongest motive and our will.
4) theocentric voluntarism, or the Calvinistic aspect of Edwards's theology which includes God's absolute priority and sovereignty, as well as his doctrine of continuous creation.
5) harmonious constitutionalism, or the Thomistic aspect which regards all aspects of salvation and history as interrelated so that every element is willed by God in relation to, and because of, every other element.

McClymond insists that rightly understanding Edwards means hearing all of these sections at once, not privileging one over the other, and learning to appreciate the harmony and connections between them.[32] This attentiveness, rooted in a "text-based, inductive approach to Edwards' writings"[33] and a recognition that Edwards is an "open systems thinker" whose thought grows, unfolds, and changes over his life, is essential for allowing Edwards to be Edwards.[34]

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[30] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 70. McClymond sees the debate over Edwards's doctrine of God as, "in some respects, a proxy war" between classical theism and its opponents. For McClymond, critics of Lee and Pauw, especially Holmes and Studebaker, "have approached Edwards' texts with definite presuppositions in mind," particularly convictions about Reformed orthodoxy and Edwards's relation to it (71–76).

[31] Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–9.

[32] This is his chief criticism of alternative interpretations of Edwards. "My objection to Crisp, Holmes, and Studebaker—expressed in musical terms—is that they seem to be sitting too near to the woodwind section to hear the violins and the strings. This is not to say that they are not hearing anything. Yet exclusive attention to the woodwinds has caused them to miss some of the loveliest melodies and most refined harmonies of the entire symphony" (McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 82.).

[33] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 87.

[34] McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 9–10. "The open systems thinker approaches most intellectual issues as works-in-progress and hence returns again and again to the same perennial

Stephen Holmes

Like McClymond, Stephen Holmes attempts to situate Edwards in light of his Puritan and Reformed orthodox background.[35] He highlights two facets of the intellectual character of Puritanism that are relevant for expositing Edwards: the confidence in human reason for understanding every area of knowledge, and the assumption that truth was unitary and was best exposited in the form of a 'technologia,' in the vein of Peter Ramus.[36] "Edwards was a Puritan pastor, preaching for revival, defending Calvinism, and understanding the events of the world around him in thoroughly theological terms."[37] His distinctively Enlightened Puritanism was "a Calvinism that has found (particularly in the doctrine of the Trinity) ways to reshape its own distinctives so that they can stand without apology in an intellectual climate shaped by the heirs of Locke and Newton."[38]

Holmes heartily concurs with McClymond's theocentric view of Edwards's thought; he is "a 'radical Calvinist' with an uncompromising assertion of the centrality and sovereignty of God."[39] On the other hand, Holmes regards Lee's main thesis concerning Edwards's embrace of a dispositional ontology (which McClymond embraces) as "simply wrong,"[40] given Edwards's

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themes," while welcoming growth, refinement, and reshaping. Closed system thinkers, on the other hand, stress systematicity and move on to new topics after issues have been discussed and resolved.

[35] Holmes regards the differences between Puritanism and Reformed orthodoxy as sociological: "the continental Reformed churches were state churches, and so owned the universities and had the leisure to pursue their reflection; Puritans in their homeland were dissenters and nonconformists, often suffering persecution" (Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory: An Account Of The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards* (T&T Clark, 2000), 15.).

[36] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 13. Holmes identifies Ramus's *Dialecticae Libri Duo* and Calvin's *Institutes* as defining works for English and American Puritanism.

[37] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 16.

[38] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 30.

[39] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 22–23.

[40] Stephen R. Holmes, Oliver Crisp, and Paul Helm, "Does Jonathan Edwards Use a Dispensational Ontology? A Response to Sang Hyun Lee," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2004), 99.

traditional Reformed theological commitments.[41] Edwards brings a "basic theological conservatism" to his thought, given the relatively stable Reformed tradition he inherited and generally upheld (allowing for minor amendments). At the same time, Holmes leaves room alongside this theological conservatism for a "radical account of metaphysics" in the thought of Edwards. Holmes believes that Lee's evidence for a dispositional ontology in Edwards is better explained by Edwards's adherence to divine simplicity and *actus purus*, his use of a psychological analogy for the Trinity, and his adherence to a strong distinction between the immanent acts of God and the economic acts of God.[42] With respect to his philosophical positions, Holmes argues that Edwards is an occasionalist,[43] an idealist who asserted that the only relevant ontological distinction that can be made is between creature and Creator, and a continuous creationist.[44]

In terms of the present study, Holmes argues that Edwards successfully gathers up "the whole tradition of discourse about the attributes of God into an overarching Trinitarian framework."[45] In Edwards, there is "a move to subsume the doctrine of the divine perfections under the doctrine of the Trinity," which effectively evacuates "the residue of a common

[41] "I cannot imagine Edwards, with the theological commitment he held to, coming up with anything like the doctrines that Lee tells us were at the heart of his system, and I believe that most if not all of the evidence Lee offers for his reconstruction can be explained as, or more, adequately by a less implausible account of what Edwards thought" (Holmes, Crisp, and Helm, "A Response to Sang Hyun Lee," 100.).

[42] Holmes, Crisp, and Helm, "A Response to Sang Hyun Lee," 104–10. According to Holmes, Edwards accepted, with his tradition, that the generation of the Son and the creation of the world are different *kinds* of acts, a fact which Lee's dispositional account elides and obscures. Moreover, Holmes finds particular fault with Lee's ascription of self-enlargement to Edwards's God, a position akin to the heresy of Socinianism.

[43] "The so-called 'laws of nature' are merely descriptions of God's usual ways of acting." Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 84.

[44] Holmes parses Edwards's adherence to continuous creation finely. "It is important to realize that Edwards' various comments on continuous creation…speak of providence as being 'equivalent to' continuous creation, rather than insisting on the actual truth of that theory." Edwards's true concern is to insist on "the radically dependent nature of creation, attacking the assumptions of matter that is itself *a se* (that is, that does not need God to exist) or a 'world-machine' that, having been set going by God, does not need His upholding to continue" (Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 92–93.).

[45] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 56.

'essence' which was so pervasive in Western theological discourse."[46] In other words, by reducing God's attributes to "only and precisely the Son and the Spirit," Edwards leaves the language of a common essence behind. Holmes regards this as a unique move in the tradition and a "radical extension of the doctrine of appropriation," salvageable only by an assertion of the doctrine of perichoresis (which Holmes believes Edwards does not directly do).[47] In this, Holmes sees Edwards as anticipating and formalizing Barth's assertion "that only by a thoroughgoing re-appropriation of the fundamentally Trinitarian nature of Christian theism can a satisfactory doctrine of the divine perfections be offered."[48]

Oliver Crisp

Oliver Crisp is a British analytic theologian who has devoted considerable energy to studying, retrieving, and analyzing Edwards's thought. He has written four major works on Edwards's theology, particularly the doctrines of God and creation, as well as numerous articles. Fundamentally, Crisp views Edwards in a twofold light. "Edwards was both a theologian who thought of himself as an heir to the Reformed tradition, and a thinker facing the new task of rethinking the Christian faith in light of the significant intellectual challenges presented to eighteenth-century European Christians."[49] On the one hand, he is firmly within the Reformed tradition; "there is nowhere in Edwards's work where he distances himself from the tradition that formed him."[50] On the other hand, he is "no mere defender of the Reformed status quo;" he is a "revisionist;"[51] a constructive theologian whose appeal was to Scripture rather than tradition."[52]

[46] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 69–70.
[47] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 71.
[48] Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 71.
[49] Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), xix.
[50] Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 93.
[51] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xvi.
[52] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 3.

His theological and scholarly method "lent itself to a certain semi-detachment from tradition and confessional encumbrance, and to greater freedom of expression and thought than that enjoyed by some of his theological contemporaries."[53] While he delighted in the Puritan and Reformed scholastics, they were "grist to his own theological mill."[54]

The result is that Crisp's Edwards was "a true original;"[55] not a maverick, but philosophically eclectic; "an intellectual magpie, gathering up useful material wherever he found it."[56] In sum, "Edwards might be thought of as an intellectual attempting to reconfigure the Reformed Orthodox theology of the early modern period in a new key, drawing on developments in the philosophy of the time in order to show the enemies of revealed religion that it was not inferior to the more fashionable options of Deism, Socinianism, and latitudinarianism."[57]

In a number of his works, Crisp summarizes his account of Edwards's view of God and creation in a simple list of propositions. The most comprehensive of these accounts is as follows.[58]

1) God is a timeless, simple pure act.[59]
2) God is free and exists *a se* (where divine freedom is understood to be consistent with determinism).
3) God is essentially creative so that God must create some world in order to "communicate" the divine self *ad extra*.[60]

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[53] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 4.
[54] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 3.
[55] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xiii.
[56] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 5.
[57] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xvii–xviii.
[58] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 76–77. Other such lists may be found in Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)., and Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on God's Relation to Creation," *JESJ* 8.1 (2018): 14–15.
[59] On which, see chapter 1.
[60] God "is essentially self-diffusive" and thus "could not have failed to create." Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 6. Like Leibniz, Edwards's "God must create this world because it is the best possible." "Edwards is also committed to the following controversial claims in his doctrine of creation: (a) God is essentially creative so that God must create some world; and (b) that any theater of divine creation must be one in which the full panoply of divine attributes are displayed, including God's justice and wrath as well as God's grace and mercy" (70). "God's nature is such that God must 'self-communicate' in some act of creation…In this way Edwards's God is like an artist for whom creative action is not merely appropriate or expected, but inevitable given the sort of

4) Any theater of divine creation must be one in which the full panoply of divine attributes are displayed, including God's justice and wrath as well as God's grace and mercy.
5) God creates for the ultimate end of displaying God's glory.
6) God communicates the divine self to elect creatures that he may be united to them via *theosis*.
7) Nothing persists through time.[61]
8) The present world is a momentary stage in a series of such stages created seriatim *ex nihilo* and segued together according to divine convention.
9) God is the only causal agent in the world.[62]
10) The world is the emanation of God's essential creativity. It is a shadowy projection from God *ad extra*.[63]

Crisp's Edwards holds to a "hypertrophied account of absolute divine sovereignty" that expresses itself in the form of "divine determinism, the necessity of creation, and the attenuated, ephemeral nature of the creation, which is emanated by God," all of which led him to embrace panentheism, which, while not necessarily unorthodox, "does put Edwards's understanding of God and creation much further from the center of classical, orthodox accounts of the divine nature (including classical, orthodox Reformed accounts)."[64]

With respect to Edwards, Crisp is engaged in both theological retrieval and theological repair.[65] He is fascinated by Edwards, but believes that Edwards's "sometimes more speculative and (over)confident reasoning" lands him in troubled waters from which he needs rescue. Crisp

talents and character God has…God must create; it is God's character to create; God cannot but create, though not through compulsion" (but through something like compulsion) (70).

[61] "Nothing persists through time — not the constituents of the world; not even the world itself. It would appear that, according to Edwards's way of thinking, 'the world' is strictly speaking a sort of approximation. Rather than describing an entity that persists through time, from creation to conflagration, 'the world' is actually shorthand for a series of momentary, but complete, worlds that God segues together making it appear that there is action across time, though, strictly speaking 'divine constitution is what makes truth' in this matter." Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 74.

[62] "There are no physical laws independent of divine action, as if the creation, once begun, is able to continue under its own steam, according to certain nomological conditions written into the world. The world does not work independently of God, programmed to run in certain ways like some sophisticated organic machine. Rather, God is immediately involved in the sustenance of creation at each moment, as he is the sole cause of its generation." Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 30.

[63] "The world is something like an emanation from God, a shadow-like entity that is the necessary product of divine creativity." Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 76.

[64] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 78–79.

[65] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xviii.

regularly surveys various possible interpretations of Edwards's writings, attempting to offer the most charitable reading possible. Crisp also frequently brings Edwards into conversation with other historical theologians, such as Anselm, Arminius, Girardeau, Aquinas, and others. Like Amy Plantinga-Pauw, Crisp sees Edwards as a model. "As Edwards attempted to use the tools of early Enlightenment philosophy for a theological end, so contemporary Christian thinkers today may borrow ideas, concepts, tools, and methods from modern intellectual disciplines in order to place theology on a firmer footing in today's intellectual climate. This need not mean the rejection of tradition in favor of theological construction. However, those wanting to imitate Edwards's example may find themselves driven to more theological revision than they had anticipated, as new light is shed upon old truths."[66]

On the question of Edwards's account of attributes, Crisp claims there is ambiguity about the key passage in Edwards used to support Holmes's assertion that Edwards removes the common essence from his account of attributes. Crisp proposes two alternative ways of understanding the real and relative distinction in Edwards's theology.[67]

> Edwardsian Trinitarian Thesis: Everything that is in God is God, and this must be understood of real attributes (which pertain to one of the persons of the Trinity), not of modalities (such as immutability).
>
> Strong Edwardsian Trinitarian Thesis: Everything that is in God is God, and this must be understood of and exhausted by "real" attributes ("real" in the Edwardsian sense, meaning attributes that pertain to one of the persons of the Trinity), not of modalities (meaning relational properties shared between the divine persons, such as immutability).

Crisp ascribes the second interpretation to Holmes, while opting for the first himself. According to Crisp, the second interpretation, by evacuating the divine essence, is essentially tritheistic. Crisp's interpretation preserves the common essence and places modal attributes (such

[66] Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xix–xx.
[67] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 133.

as immutability, eternity, and the like) within it, rather than reducing all of God's attributes to persons of the Godhead. In effect, Crisp's account of Edwards posits two categories of attributes: those that are particular to one or other divine person, and attributes that are merely modes and relations in God (which are retained in a common divine essence).[68] Crisp finds Edwards's account lacking, and attempts to tidy it up by proposing three categories of attributes: 1) relational attributes held in common in a divine essence (immutability, eternity, infinity); 2) real attributes of an Edwardsean variety that refer to only one divine person (wisdom and love); 3) relational attributes that refer to only one or only two divine persons (being eternally begotten (Son) and "being one from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds" (Father and Son). Crisp fears that Edwards's eccentric view of attributes threatens the inseparable operations of God *ad extra* as well as the unity of God's being. As a result, he questions whether Edwards can unequivocally endorse divine simplicity.[69]

Kyle Strobel

For Kyle Strobel, Edwards is a "true theologian…one who is compelled by the mystery of the gospel and its God, overcome by the deepest dimensions of God's self-revelation in Christ."[70] Edwards, like John Owen, is "a thinker working creatively within the Reformed/Puritan framework" while offering a "robust *catholic* theology."[71] Strobel offers a reinterpretation of Edwards's theology which involves a four step movement.

> First, Edwards's theology begins with God, in his eternal life as Trinity, as the ontological principle which grounds his systematic task. Second, Edwards begins 'from eternity' and then 'descends' to address God's work in time, or, in other words, God's economic movement to create and sustain. Third, this work in time is the work of

[68] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 134.
[69] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 135–37.
[70] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 2. Edwards was "a Reformed theologian, pastor, apologist and missionary who interpreted all reality through the lens of the gospel and, ultimately, God's own life, what Edwards depicted as 'the supreme harmony of all'."
[71] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 232.

> redemption, directing the 'revolutions in the world' and guiding it toward resurrection, judgement and consummation. Fourth and finally, Edwards's theology is a theology of redemptive history, grounded in and formed by the God who is redeeming, or more specifically, the God who redeems in, through and as Christ.[72]

Strobel describes this movement in terms of a wheel, which begins with God in his triunity, and descends to creation, then regeneration, to sanctification (epitomized as religious affections), to consummation, and returning again to God. The turning of this wheel is the emanation and remanation of God's fullness, which Edwards identifies as God's ultimate end in creation.[73]

Strobel sets his interpretation over against that of Lee, linking himself more closely with Crisp and Holmes. In Strobel's view, Lee does not give adequate weight to Edwards as a theologian, fails to properly weigh various genres of writing in his use of Edwards's corpus, and fails to recognize important development in Edwards's thought. The result is that, to Strobel, Lee's Edwards is highly implausible, since it seems to deny God's aseity.[74]

In addition to Lee, Strobel engages extensively with the work of Studebaker, Pauw, and McClymond. Strobel contends that Studebaker's account of Edwards's trinitarianism is too Augustinian, failing to recognizes those areas where Edwards is idiosyncratic.[75] On the other hand, Pauw wrongly asserts that Edwards uses a social analogy for the Trinity as a counterbalance to his psychological analogy.[76] Significantly Strobel claims that his reinterpretation of Edwards addresses McClymond's five-part "orchestra," avoids the criticisms

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[72] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 4.

[73] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 12–13. See also Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 39–66.

[74] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 18–20.

[75] Strobel argues that there is a significant development in Edwards's thought from Miscellany 308 to the *Discourse* which Studebaker fails to recognize. Miscellany 308 offers a more or less Augustinian account of the relationship between the divine essence, divine understanding, and divine will, whereas *Discourse* adopts an alternative account of this relationship, which relies on perichoresis. See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 40–44, 67.

[76] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 68–69.

that McClymond levels at Crisp, Holmes, and Studebaker, *and* simultaneously offers a clear, compelling (and less radical) alternative to Lee.[77]

In Strobel's telling, Edwards's theology is "fundamentally trinitarian," and Edwards's account of the Trinity includes the identification of real properties in God (understanding and will), along with affirmations of divine simplicity, infinity, *actus purus*, and perichoresis.[78] Strobel offers an extensive exposition and evaluation of Edwards's *Discourse on the Trinity*, situating Edwards in light of the anti-trinitarian conflicts of his day. Edwards's understanding of the Trinity centers on the notion of divine personhood and includes three major themes.

> First, Edwards's argument moves from a specific concept of divine personhood (through a psychological analogy) and advances to a conception of divine personhood through perichoresis…Second,…the conceptual vehicle Edwards utilizes to talk about the processions is the beatific vision (the Father and Son gazing upon one another with a 'happifying' result)…Third, Edwards provides a twofold demarcation of God's attributes, first 'real', and second, 'relational'. Real attributes are God's understanding and will (or anything that can fall under those categories) and relational attributes are extrinsic attributes which do not obtain essentially in God.[79]

The last theme has particular bearing for the present study. In an appendix, Strobel offers the most extensive treatment of Edwards's view of attributes in print. As his account has been useful in setting the parameters for my own treatment of the subject, a summary of this appendix is in order.

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[77] In particular, Strobel's work is an attempt to discern Edwards's theology from a close and rightly weighted reading of key texts, in light of his theological and polemical context, and without attempting to prejudge Edwards as a party in a theological proxy war. See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 228–33.

[78] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 39.

[79] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 14. Strobel suggests that Edwards conceived of the Trinity in terms of "personal beatific-delight" (26). However, as McDermott notes, the use of the terms "beatific" and "delight" are redundant. See Gerald R. McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards and God's Inner Life: A Response to Kyle Strobel," *Themelios* 39 (2014): 147. If Strobel intended to link God's own trinitarian light with the traditional concept of the beatific vision, a better term would be "personal visionary-delight."

Strobel's appendix is an attempt to carve a *via media* between Crisp and Holmes on the relation of the divine essence and persons through an interpretation of Edwards's use of real and relational properties.[80] Strobel's account of Edwards may be summarized as follows.

1) There is a divine essence, and it subsists in God, his understanding, and love, which simply are the persons of the Godhead.[81]
2) Like Turretin, the divine attributes cannot be distinguished from the divine essence.
3) However, in terms of predication of attributes, the statement "God is immutable" is true, but the statement "Immutability is God" is not, because it is unintelligible. The latter claim creates a problem in attribute predication, since it appears that some attributes (like immutability) cannot be identified with the divine essence.
4) Edwards's solution to this problem is the real and relational attributes distinction.
5) Real attributes are intrinsic to God "without reference to anything else." Real attributes simply are the persons of the Trinity.[82]
6) God's idea is the Son, which is identical to understanding, wisdom, and omniscience.
7) God's will is the Holy Spirit, which is identical to power, love, holiness, justice, mercy, goodness, and grace.
8) Real attributes are things that truly constitute personal being, and thus are predicated of God qua persons.
9) Relational attributes are extrinsic to God; that is, they are modal and circumstantial. They are truly predicable of God, but not intrinsic to God. Relational attributes are like Cambridge properties.[83]
10) Relational attributes are true of God qua deity, but not predicated of God qua persons.[84]

According to Strobel, while Edwards's account is idiosyncratic in the tradition, it is solidly within the bounds of Reformed orthodox debate concerning the divine essence, attributes, and predication.[85]

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[80] Throughout his appendix, Strobel uses the terms "properties" and "attributes" interchangeably. See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 234.

[81] Thus, contra Holmes, Strobel does not see Edwards jettisoning the divine essence.

[82] "'Real' properties are those properties that are properly predicated of persons as such." (Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 240.). For Edwards, real properties are personal properties, that is, things that truly constitute personal being" (239).

[83] Cambridge properties refer to "the property of distance between a person and Cambridge University" (Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 240.). Strobel claims that Crisp misunderstands Edwards's use of the term "relative." In an article responding to Strobel, Crisp says that attributes like immutability and infinity cannot be extrinsic or Cambridge properties, "because they bespeak something about the divine nature independent of anything created" (Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *JESJ* 4.1 (2014): 38.).

[84] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 239.

[85] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 242. Paul Helm offers a slightly different account of Edwards's view of real and relative attributes, arguing that this distinction "corresponds closely to that between what later divines referred to as the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God." Real attributes simply are the

Brief Survey of Other Scholars

Beyond these scholars, a number of others have contributed important elements to the present work. Amy Plantinga Pauw's seminal work on Edwards's trinitarianism establishes a baseline for engaging with Edwards on the doctrine of divine simplicity and his use of the psychological model for the Trinity.[86] Paul Helm and Richard Muller have written extensively on Edwards's view of the freedom of the will, necessity, and contingency in light of the Reformed orthodox tradition.[87] In that vein, John Fisk's magisterial work on Edwards's view of the will is now the benchmark for evaluating Edwards's fidelity to the classic Reformed tradition on these matters.[88] In his recent monograph, Seng-Kong Tan has capably situated Edwards's trinitarianism in relation to his anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, drawing these various *loci* together around Edwards's notion of emanation and remanation.[89]

One scholar whose work on Edwards has been woefully under-engaged in the secondary literature is Walter Schultz.[90] An analytic philosopher, Schultz has devoted his scholarly efforts to

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persons of the Trinity, and "all the other divine attributes are nothing other than the understanding and will of God, either singly or together. Infinity, eternity, and immortality are modes of his existence, the Father. Understanding, wisdom and omniscience, are modes of his idea of himself, the Son. Love is a mode of his will, the Spirit. Power is a mode of understanding and will together. God's holiness is a mode of his love to himself and is not really distinct from his justice. Goodness, mercy and grace, are modes of God's infinite love." See Paul Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 102–3.

[86] Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[87] See Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 1.1 (2011): 3–22; Paul Helm, "Jonathan Edwards and the Parting of the Ways?," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.1 (2014): 42–60; Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of Will. In Response to Paul Helm," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 266–85; Paul Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 286–96.

[88] Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

[89] Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014).

[90] See Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation: An Exposition and Defense," *JETS* 49.1 (2006): 247-271.; Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation and Spinoza's Conundrum," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 2.2 (2012): 28–55; Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Philosophical Argument for God's End in Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 297–326; Walter Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," *JETS* 59.2 (2016): 339–359; Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Concept of an

expositing and defending Edwards's argument in *The End For Which God Created the World* in light of his trinitarian thought, as well as tracing the implications of Edwards's argument in terms of his metaphysical commitments.[91] Schultz contends that, according to Edwards, "*God's original ultimate end* in creating and sustaining the world is the pleasure he takes in his self-knowledge, holiness, and happiness eternally-increasing in a society of beings who are upheld in existence moment-by moment *ex nihilo*." Schultz further claims that Edwards's view has a number of metaphysical entailments: Holy Spirit emanationism (as opposed to Neoplatonism), analogical dispositionalism, intentional-object panentheism (as distinct from mind-body panentheism), *res*-idealism (as opposed to *mens*-idealism), continuous creationism, and semi-occasionalism.[92]

Justification for the Present Study

This brief survey reveals that Edwards scholarship is fiercely contested at two key points: 1) Edwards's doctrine of God, and 2) Edwards's account of the God-world relation. The former includes debates about whether he embraces divine simplicity and whether his trinitarian theology is coherent. The latter includes debates about creation's necessity and God's aseity and freedom. I propose that Edwards's understanding of the divine attributes provides a useful place

Original Ultimate End," *JETS* 56.1 (2013): 107–22; Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Argument That God's End in Creation Must Manifest His Supreme Self-Regard," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.1 (2014): 82-103.; Walter J. Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist? The Concept of Emanation in End of Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8.1 (2018): 17–36.

[91] I engage extensively with Schultz in chapter 6.

[92] According to Schultz, Holy Spirit emanationism differs from Neoplatonic emanationism in that Neoplatonic varieties are metaphysically monistic and view creation itself as an emanation from God. In contrast, Edwards's emanationism falls under redemption, not creation, and involves God's own knowledge, love, and joy indwelling and asymptotically increasing in his redeemed creatures forever. Intentional-object panentheism views the world as existing in God's mind as an intentionally imagined and willed scenario, as opposed to versions of panentheism which view the world as God's body. Edwards's idealism differs from the subjective idealism of Berkeley which views material objects as merely phenomenal constructs in the mind. Rather, for Edwards, material objects are real in relation to humans, but ideal in relation to God's mind. See Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 339–59.

to adjudicate these debates. The divine attributes are, as it were, a bridge between the triune God as he is in himself and the world that he has created for himself. Thus, this present project is not a treatment of Edwards's thoughts on individual attributes. I do not offer extended reflections on Edwards's view of the righteousness of God, or the mercy of God, or the omnipresence of God. Instead, this project is more of a prolegomena to that sort of (valuable) effort.

Writing in 2010, Sebastian Rehnman claimed that "No scholarly analysis has to my knowledge been devoted to Edwards's understanding of divine attributes."[93] This project is an attempt to fill that lacuna. By grasping Edward's view of God's attributes, particularly the taxonomy by which he organizes and distinguishes them, we place ourselves in a better position to resolve puzzles and assess claims about Edwards's trinitarianism and his view of the God-world relation. In particular, my hope is that this study is able to resolve the debate regarding Edwards's understanding of divine simplicity, the shape and importance of his psychological account of the Trinity, as well as provide clarity on various puzzling dimensions of his metaphysics: his supposed panentheism, his idealism, and his view of creation's necessity and God's freedom.

In the process, I will offer a detailed exposition of Edwards's *Discourse on the Trinity,* seeking to interpret it in light of 1) Edwards's polemical context, particularly in relation to the anti-trinitarian controversy as epitomized by Samuel Clarke, 2) the Reformed orthodox theological tradition, of which Edwards was an heir, and 3) Edwards's own theological commitments and categories as expressed elsewhere in his writings.

[93] Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Distinction between Natural and Moral Attributes Good? Jonathan Edwards on Divine Attributes," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.1 (2010): 59–60. He notes the brief sections in Delattre and Gerstner, but says that neither contains any analysis.

At one level, this project is an attempt to understand the following two quotations in light of Edwards's theology as a whole.

> So divines make a distinction between the natural and moral perfections of God: by the moral perfections of God, they mean those attributes which God exercises as a moral agent, or whereby the heart and will of God are good, right, and infinitely becoming, and lovely; such as his righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness; or, in one word, his holiness. By God's natural attributes or perfections, they mean those attributes, wherein, according to our way of conceiving of God, consists, not the holiness or moral goodness of God, but his greatness; such as his power, his knowledge whereby he knows all things, and his being eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, his omnipresence, and his awful and terrible majesty.[94]

> It is a maxim amongst divines that everything that is in God is God, which must be understood of real attributes and not of mere modalities. If a man should tell me that the immutability of God is God, or that the omnipresence of God and authority of God [is God], I should not be able to think of any rational meaning of what he said. It hardly sounds to me proper to say that God's being without change is God, or that God's being everywhere is God, or that God's having a right of government over creatures is God. But if it be meant that the real attributes of God, viz. his understanding and love, are God, then what we have said may in some measure explain how it is so: for Deity subsists in them distinctly, so they are distinct divine persons.[95]

Edwards uses the terms attributes, excellencies, perfections, and properties interchangeably. In his proposed Rational Account from 1729-1730, Edwards linked the Trinity, God's attributes, and God's decrees under the heading of "excellency."[96] In an early miscellany he expresses his recognition of the value of studying the Trinity and God's decrees, in contrast to his earlier apathetic attitude.

> I used to think sometimes with myself, if such doctrines as those of the Trinity and decrees are true, yet what need was there of revealing of them in the gospel? what good do they do towards the advancing [of] holiness? But now I don't wonder at all at their being revealed, for such doctrines as these are glorious inlets into the knowledge and view of the spiritual world, and the contemplation of supreme things; the knowledge of which I have experienced how much it contributes to the betterment of the heart. If such doctrines as these had not been revealed, the church would never have been let half so far into the view of the spiritual world, as God intends it shall be before the world is at an

[94] *WJE* 2:255.
[95] *WJE* 21:132.
[96] *WJE* 6:396.

> end. I know by experience, how useful these doctrines be to lead to this knowledge. God doubtless knew what was needful to be revealed.[97]

In Miscellany 654, Edwards expresses his hopeful anticipation of the day when the mysteries and perplexities of the Christian life will finally be resolved in the beatific vision.

> For the time is coming when these mysteries will all be unfolded, and the perplexing difficulties that have attended them will all be perfectly vanished away, as the shades of the night before the sun in a serene hemisphere. And when this time comes, that having formerly [been] so mysterious and difficult to us, will be the occasion of a greater and stronger sense of the truth and knowledge of God, now they are unfolded. It will heighten in us, and greatly fix upon our minds, a sense of his truth, in that he now so clearly appears to be true, perfectly true, in those things that have had the greatest appearance of falsehood, and wherein we have been most liable to temptation to question God's truth, and that have been matter of difficulty to the world for so many ages. And the difficulty and perplexity that has attended those doctrines that have been most difficult to reconcile to God's justice and goodness, will serve to give us a stronger and fuller persuasion, and a higher sense of those perfections of God, when we see him to be perfectly just and holy in those things that have occasioned the blasphemies of multitudes against those perfections of God, and that the whole world, and we ourselves, have been so much perplexed about.[98]

He goes on to testify to his own personal experience in receiving anticipations of this eschatological joy, when after a period of arduous study, he attains "a great measure of satisfaction in some doctrines that have before [been] very difficult to me." This resolution not only confirmed his belief in the doctrine but raised his thoughts to the attributes of God, and confirmed him in a persuasion of God's perfections in general.[99]

His interest in God's attributes persisted throughout his life. In his "Subjects of Inquiry" notebook, composed late in his life, Edwards expresses his desire to show "the mischief that is done through improper DISTINCTIONS by reason of difference of words and names, supposing there be an answerable, proper, real and thorough distinction in things."[100] In particular, he

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[97] *WJE* 13:328.
[98] *WJE* 18:195.
[99] *WJE* 18:196
[100] Jonathan Edwards, "'Subjects of Inquiry,'" in *WJEO* 27. The editors describe the Subject of Inquiry notebook as "a late manuscript booklet of memoranda outlining scholarly projects and study aims, "Subjects of

highlights divine attributes (along with graces, virtues, faculties, and affections of the soul) as one area where improper distinctions abound and cause mischief. Thus, Edwards regarded attribute distinctions as a crucial area of theological study.

My basic thesis is that Edwards fundamentally distinguishes God's attributes in two ways. The first, rooted in Edwards's trinitarian theology, divides God's attributes into natural and moral excellencies, with natural excellencies corresponding to the Son (and/or the Father), and moral excellencies corresponding to the Holy Spirit. The second, rooted in the Creator-creature distinction, divides God's attributes into real or absolute attributes and modal or relative attributes, or attributes that apply to God in himself apart from creation, and attributes that apply to God in relation to creation. Edwards's innovation comes in his coordination of these two kinds of distinctions, resulting in the reduction of all of God's attributes to persons of the Godhead. Or to put it another way, Edwards adopts the absolute-relative distinction, weds it to a strong psychological account of the Trinity (which contains the seeds of the natural and moral attributes distinction) with the result that God's attributes are either persons of the Trinity or those persons in various modes and relations. Significantly, Edwards's taxonomy wholeheartedly embraces divine simplicity and preserves divine aseity, freedom, and creation's purposefulness.

Overview of the Chapters

Part 1 contains four chapters and focuses especially on divine simplicity, divine attributes, and the Trinity. Chapter 1 begins with an examination of divine simplicity. After surveying the current range of scholarly opinion on Edward's view of divine simplicity, I proceed to offer an overview of the doctrine as it was expressed among the medieval and

Inquiry" provides clues to many intellectual interests Edwards was pursuing in the latter part of his life, from sketches for treatises to arguments about human nature and identity to thematic Scripture reviews."

Reformed scholastics. Drawing on the work of Richard Muller and Steven Duby, I explore the various ways that the doctrine of divine simplicity is coordinated with God's essence, his attributes, and the doctrine of the Trinity, demonstrating the fundamental claim of divine simplicity (the denial of composition to God), as well as the great variation in the various distinctions which are proposed to make sense of God's attributes and the divine persons in light of it.

In Chapter 2 I offer an initial exploration of Edwards's view of divine simplicity (and its corollary, the pure act account of God's nature) in his early sermons and miscellanies as well as his later letters and treatises. I attempt to show Edwards's basic and unremarkable adherence to divine simplicity.

Chapter 3 explores crucial background for understanding Edward's argument in his *Discourse on the Trinity*, which contains the primary contested passages in debates about Edwards's view of divine simplicity. I first identify relevant sources for Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity, as well as exposit the work of Samuel Clarke as a representative of the kind of anti-trinitarianism which *Discourse on the Trinity* is designed to overthrow. Additionally, given Edwards's widely acknowledged use of a psychological model of the Trinity, I explore the use of psychological analogies among Puritan and Reformed orthodox theologians, noting the variety in their embrace and deployment of the analogy, and situating Edwards in relation to them.

With that background, in Chapter 4 I then offer an exposition of the *Discourse*, tracing its argument up through the contested passages, drawing attention to the compatibility of Edwards's account with the standard classical theistic views of the Trinity, and identifying three innovative theological moves that Edwards makes. With this exposition in hand, I return to the criticisms of Edwards's view of divine simplicity and his trinitarian thought, evaluating his innovation in light

of its conformity to the Reformed orthodox tradition, and defending Edwards's views against charges of its inconsistency. Thus, the first four chapters form a distinct unit which establishes a) that Edwards embraced divine simplicity, b) that the doctrine was essential for his trinitarian thought and his account of attributes, and c) that his innovations, while real and unique, leave him firmly within the larger Reformed tradition.

Part 2 transitions to examine God's attributes in light of his works *ad extra*. Chapters 5 surveys key attribute classification systems among the Reformed scholastics, highlighting varying taxonomies by which they understand the divine perfections. Additionally, I show the outworking of such classification systems in the thought of Francis Turretin and William Ames.

Chapter 6 identifies and clarifies Edwards's own systems of attribute classification. I argue that Edwards employs two primary taxonomies, one flowing from his psychological account and distributing attributes according to the divine faculties of understanding and will, and the other distinguishing attributes based on the Creator-creature distinction. The former yields what Edwards calls natural and moral attributes, whereas the latter yields real and relative attributes. Additionally, I note that relative attributes may be divided into negative attributes and capacity attributes. Finally, I argue that Edwards makes an innovative and unique move in the tradition by correlating these attribute taxonomies such that all of God's perfections may be reduced to persons of the Godhead.

Chapter 7 shows the outworking of Edwards's classification systems by surveying select attributes of God and showing both Edward's traditionalism in his articulation of individual attributes, as well as how his taxonomy treats divine power, knowledge, and the decree. In particular, I note the way in which God's decree refracts God's real attributes into the myriad of relative attributes which enable God's creatures to truly know him.

Chapter 8 attempts to apply the results of this study to contested areas of Edwards's theology, specifically his account of the God-world relation. In particular, many scholars claim that Edwards holds that God is essentially creative, that creation is necessary, and that Edwards's view threatens divine aseity. Moreover, other scholars claim that Edwards parts ways with the Reformed orthodox tradition on the question of divine freedom. To adjudicate these claims, I survey the Reformed scholastics on divine freedom and necessity, comparing and contrasting Turretin and Ames with Edwards on the will and divine freedom. I argue that whereas the Reformed tradition navigated divine freedom using various kinds of necessity, contingence, and the liberty of indifference, Edwards collapses certain kinds of necessity, narrows and rejects any notion of contingence with respect to God, and rejects all forms of the liberty of indifference as incoherent. Thus, his account of divine freedom, while similar to the Reformed orthodox tradition, operates with slightly different conceptual tools.

Chapter 9 takes stock of the previous three chapters and allows for a more careful evaluation of Crisp's account of Edwards, one which identifies key weaknesses and misinterpretations of Edwards's thought. In particular, I challenge the claims that Edwards held that God emanates creation, that creation is necessary, that he compromised divine aseity through his view of potentially dormant attributes, and that his account of divine freedom differed fundamentally from the Reformed orthodox. In particular, I explore the key Edwardsean category of "fitness" as an alternative way of steering between a hard necessitarianism on the one hand and a total irrationality and causelessness on the other.

My conclusion recapitulates the entire argument, offering an account of Edwards's doctrine of God and creation that places him firmly within the Reformed orthodox tradition of classical theism, while also identifying Edwards's uniqueness with greater specificity.

PART 1 REAL ATTRIBUTES: DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND THE TRINITY

CHAPTER 1 DIVINE SIMPLICITY AMONG THE MEDIEVAL AND REFORMED SCHOLASTICS

1. Modern Critics on Edwards's View of Divine Simplicity

When it comes to Edwards's view of divine simplicity, scholars are sharply divided. Roughly speaking, claims about Edwards and simplicity can be divided into four classes: 1) Edwards strongly rejected divine simplicity; 2) Edwards questioned and had an ambiguous relationship to divine simplicity; 3) Edwards embraced divine simplicity but it sits uneasily in his theological system; 4) Edwards forthrightly embraced the doctrine of divine simplicity as he received it from his Reformed orthodox forebears.

As to the first claim, Amy Plantinga Pauw has argued that Edwards's view of real distinctions within the Godhead was in "explicit contradiction to the doctrine of divine simplicity."[101] "Edwards rejected the broad Reformed tendency to tailor the doctrine of the Trinity to fit with divine simplicity."[102] This strong claim is textually rooted in at least two key passages in Edwards.

> I think it really evident from the light of reason that there are these three distinct in God. If God has an idea of himself, there is really a duplicity; because [if] there is no duplicity, it will follow that Jehovah thinks of himself no more than a stone. And if God loves himself and delights in himself, there is really a triplicity, three that cannot be confounded, each of which are the Deity substantially.[103]

> If a man should tell me that the immutability of God is God, or that the omnipresence of God and authority of God [is God], I should not be able to think of any rational meaning of what he said. It hardly sounds to me proper to say that God's being without change is

[101] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "One Alone Cannot Be Excellent: Edwards on Divine Simplicity," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (New York: Routledge, 2003), 120.

[102] Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 70.

[103] *WJE* 13:262.

> God, or that God's being everywhere is God, or that God's having a right of government over creatures is God.[104]

With respect to the first, Pauw quotes Turretin on the same issue and writes that Edwards "was flatly contradicting the tradition of divine simplicity."[105] With respect to the second, Edwards "explicitly rejected the 'maxim amongst divines'" that "everything that is in God is God."[106] He "self-consciously departed from the scholastic and Puritan consensus regarding the identity of all of God's attributes with God."[107] Furthermore, his use of the psychological model in his *Essay on the Trinity* was "a violation of the simplicity tradition."[108]

While Plantinga Pauw frequently asserts that Edwards defied his theological tradition and explicitly rejected divine simplicity, at other times she moderates her claim. Rather than outright defiance, Edwards has an "ambivalence" toward the simplicity tradition.[109] He asserts it "casually" or "reflexively" simply because he inherited it from his forebears. His use of the simplicity tradition was "infrequent and indiosyncratic."[110] She sometimes speaks of his "departure from its strictures" rather than a wholesale rejection of the doctrine. The inherited doctrine "influenced" him, but "was never truly incorporated into his theology."[111] When he asserts it, there is "no explanation of what he understands divine simplicity to entail."[112] These claims are weaker, and give the impression that, while Edwards was willing to check the

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[104] *WJE* 21:132.

[105] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 70. Turretin wrote, "simplicity and triplicity are so mutually opposed that they cannot subsist at the same time." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 3.7.9, 193. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:283.

[106] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 72.

[107] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 72.

[108] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 74.

[109] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 69.

[110] Pauw, "One Alone Cannot Be Excellent," 119.

[111] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 69.

[112] Pauw, *Supreme Harmony of All*, 71.

simplicity box on his theological questionnaire, his real interest and energy lay elsewhere. Simplicity was a marginal doctrine at best.

Michael McClymond also contends for Edwards's ambivalence about the doctrine. What Edwards rejects is not the doctrine itself, but the "emphasis on divine simplicity" in the Western Trinitarian tradition.[113] With respect to the second quotation on immutability and omnipresence above, McClymond writes, "Here he was not so much offering an argument against the hard version of the simplicity doctrine as he was questioning its intelligibility."[114] On McClymond's reading, Edwards, like Alvin Plantinga, finds the hard version of simplicity doctrine to be incoherent. By "hard version of the simplicity doctrine," McClymond seems to mean "it is impossible for there to be a real metaphysical distinction between one essential characteristic and another in God's being."[115] Edwards "disavowed one common way of understanding divine simplicity—the identification of God or God's essence with each of God's attributes."[116] Significantly, McClymond doesn't regard Edwards's objection to one aspect of divine simplicity as evidence of his radical departure from the tradition. On the contrary, McClymond's reading of the work of Richard Muller on Reformed orthodoxy leads him to treat Edwards as one in a long line of Calvinists who challenged the doctrine of divine simplicity.[117] Nevertheless, like Plantinga Pauw in her more moderate moments, McClymond believes that Edwards disavowed certain aspects of divine simplicity and embraced others with a kind of reluctance.

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[113] Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 197.

[114] Michael J. McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony: A Critique of Some Critics of Sang Lee's and Amy Pauw's Accounts of Jonathan Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 74.

[115] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 75. McClymond draws this definition from Eleanore Stump by way of Oliver Crisp.

[116] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 88.

[117] On this reading of Muller, see below.

In contrast to these two understandings of Edwards's view of divine simplicity, Oliver Crisp has argued that Edwards advocated divine simplicity. Far from departing from his inherited tradition, Edwards "upholds a strong doctrine of divine unity in Thomistic fashion like a number of his Reformed forebears."[118] Crisp presents evidence that Edwards embraced both divine simplicity and its corollary the pure act account of the divine nature.[119] At the same time, Crisp believes that Edwards's idiosyncratic view of the Trinity jeopardized his commitment to divine simplicity.[120] Crisp's criticism of Edwards can be summarized under three headings: the simplicity-excellency dilemma, the a priori argument for the Trinity, and the reduction of attributes to persons.[121] The simplicity-excellency dilemma arises from Edwards's purported adherence to divine simplicity and a pure act account of the divine nature, coupled with his robust (and somewhat unique) account of God's excellency. "For Edwards excellency functions as a semi-technical term that has several constituents: an aesthetic component (having to do with beauty, symmetry, and 'similarness'); a relational component (having to do with 'agreement,' 'consent,' and the 'equality' between parts of things of a whole, and their 'communication'); and an ontological component (having to do with being)."[122] Edwards's notion of excellency is derived fundamentally from a series of notes in his "Notes on the Mind."

> One alone, without any reference to any more, cannot be excellent; for in such case there can be no manner of relation no way, and therefore, no such thing as consent. Indeed, what we call "one" may be excellent, because of a consent of parts, or some consent of

[118] Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *JESJ* 4.1 (2014): 29.

[119] Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38–41.

[120] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 137.

[121] Crisp identifies three challenges for Edwards's trinitarian theology. The first is the problem of divine simplicity and Edwards's view of divine excellency and the individuation of persons (which I have split out in my treatment). The second is confusion about Edwards's understanding of person and essence. The third is Edwards's unique deployment of perichoresis. See Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 21.

[122] Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 26. Elsewhere he writes, "Excellency is an Edwardsian term of art. It is an attribute that requires the object of which it is predicated to have a kind of internal order, proportion (of relations of parts within an entity, or of which an entity is composed), 'agreement' (of internal relations and parts), and 'consent' (agreement between relations and parts) that can only be maximally exemplified by a being that has an *essential* and *irreducible* plurality." See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 95.

> those in that being that are distinguished into a plurality some way or other. But in a being that is absolutely without any plurality there cannot be excellency, for there can be no such thing as consent or agreement.[123]

God, if he is excellent, must be "irreducibly plural."[124] Crisp argues that the Edwardsian concept of excellency cannot be attributed to the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the simple, non-composite God.[125] "God cannot be both metaphysically simple (i.e. a being without any parts) and also excellent (i.e. a being possessing the internal differentiation necessary for 'consent' and, therefore with the plurality necessary for the Godhead)."[126] Or again, "it appears metaphysically impossible for one entity to be both simple and excellent, given these conceptual parameters."[127]

Crisp's second criticism of Edwards, which he views as more formidable, has to do with Edwards's "a priori argument for the Trinity, which attempts, unsuccessfully, to make sense of the Augustinian (and biblical) argument that the Son is the very image of the Father."[128] Edwards's attempt to individuate the persons using the psychological analogy involves "a crucial

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[123] *WJE* 6:337.

[124] Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 21.

[125] One challenge in expounding Crisp's view of the simplicity-excellency dilemma is that at times it is unclear whether he thinks it is a true problem for Edwards. In *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, Crisp eventually absolves Edwards of any problem on this score: "The evidence marshaled against this interpretation that yields the simplicity-excellency dilemma is actually based on a misunderstanding of what Edwards was getting at in the 'Discourse on the Trinity'" (116). Thus, the earlier tension Crisp identified between Edwardsian excellency and the Reformed orthodox doctrine of simplicity is merely apparent. Thus, Crisp can say that Edwards's "doctrine of divine excellency is not necessarily incompatible with a doctrine of divine simplicity," since simplicity among the Reformed orthodox is a piece of apophatic theology, denying that God is composite (11). However, in his subsequent article on "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," Crisp presents it as an enduring problem for Edwards (40). Or better, Edwards's understanding of excellency brings into sharp relief the tension between divine simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity that is present in the entire orthodox Christian tradition. The reason for this is that Crisp himself at times seems unsure whether divine simplicity is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. Crisp is aware of the fact that the Reformed scholastics "did not appear to see any problem in affirming both divine simplicity and the Trinity either. (Indeed, the same could be said for the vast majority of traditional, classical Christian divines prior to the Reformation.)" See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 7; Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 40. On the contrary, "God's simplicity…was not only commensurate with the doctrine of the Trinity, it anchored Trinitarianism within monotheism, providing a strong basis on which to resist tritheism." See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 116. Nevertheless, Crisp repeatedly presents the Trinity and simplicity as invariably in tension. See Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards's God: Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 103.

[126] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 101.

[127] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 101.

[128] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 118.

sleight of hand" that renders the argument nonsensical.[129] Moreover, "Edwards's argument entails the infinite iteration of perfect ideas of Godself in the divine mind."[130] What's more, the argument, if successful, doesn't merely prove three divine persons, but three divine essences.[131] Finally, Edwards's argument posits "real distinctions" in God, which on Crisp's understanding of things is incompatible with Edwards's endorsement of divine simplicity.[132]

Crisp's final criticism, which he views as the most problematic of all, is what he calls Edwards's second strategy for individuating the divine persons—namely, by reducing some of God's attributes to the persons of the Godhead. While Crisp doesn't go so far as Stephen Holmes, who believes that Edwards's reduction of attributes leads to the loss of the divine essence in Edwards's theology, Crisp does regard Edwards's thought at this point as seriously "underdeveloped." One result is that, because Edwards parcels out some of God's attributes to divine persons, he cannot consistently affirm a robust doctrine of divine simplicity. For, according to Edwards, Crisp says, "the attributes that distinguish the divine persons are not identical with the divine essence. If they were, there would be no means by which to individuate the divine persons."[133] Furthermore, this violation of simplicity also threatens the principle of the

[129] "What Edwards says is that God takes infinite delight in himself and God takes infinite delight in his perfect idea of himself. On the face of it, this seems very peculiar, perhaps even contradictory." See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 121. Crisp believes that Edwards effectively collapses the distinction between the Father and the Son (122).

[130] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 123–25. "Edwards's argument entails the infinite iterability of ideas in the divine mind." See Crisp, "Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," 90. Crisp identifies the same infinite iterability in relation to the Holy Spirit.

[131] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 122, 126. "He is guilty of 'reasoning into existence' a second divine being, not merely a second divine person of the Trinity." See Crisp, "Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," 90 f.n. 21. Helm makes the same criticism in Paul Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 98.

[132] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 136. "If God is truly simple, then there can be no real metaphysical distinctions in the divine nature between one essential characteristic and another."

[133] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 115. At the same time, Crisp holds that, contrary to the Reformed tradition, Edwards distinguishes the persons by more than their relations of origin. See Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 31.

inseparable operations of the Trinity *ad extra*.[134] Moreover, his use of perichoresis to preserve personhood does too much "metaphysical heavy lifting," identifying the persons as constitutive components or parts of the others.[135] The final result is that, on Crisp's interpretation, "Edwards was unable to reconcile his peculiar form of Trinitarianism with a commitment to…an apophatic doctrine of divine simplicity."

Over the next four chapters, I will challenge all three of these views regarding Edwards and divine simplicity, and argue in favor of the fourth—Edwards forthrightly embraced divine simplicity.[136] Not only does he embrace it, but, like the tradition of which he is a part, simplicity is integral to his trinitarian theology. Apart from a robust and classical affirmation of divine simplicity, Edwards's trinitarian theology simply won't work. At the same time, Edwards is unusual and innovative in important respects, especially in relation to his use of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, his taxonomy of attributes, and his deployment of the doctrine of perichoresis.

1.1 Defining Divine Simplicity

In order to better understand Edwards's view of divine simplicity, it is first necessary to bring clarity to the doctrine itself, especially as it was articulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, some of the debate over Edwards and simplicity suffers from an

[134] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 135–36. "Most seriously, partitioning the divine attributes into those that are 'real' and those that are 'relational' (in the Edwardsian sense) means that the *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* principle, which is a crucial constituent of a doctrine of divine simplicity, is in danger of being compromised. Edwards seems unable to avoid the impression that certain divine attributes conventionally thought to belong to the divine essence, such as wisdom or knowledge, are the peculiar preserve of one or another divine person rather than shared together in the divine life."

[135] Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 40–41.

[136] Others who advocate for Edwards's embrace of simplicity include Steve Studebaker, "Jonathan Edwards's Social Augustinian Trinitarianism: An Alternative to a Recent Trend," *SJT* 56.3 (2003); Robert W. Caldwell III, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2007); Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

anachronistic approach to the doctrine. For example, McClymond criticizes Crisp for taking his start "not from the historical context of the late 1600s and early 1700s but from the conceptual analyses of Eleanore Stump."[137] Instead, McClymond argues, discussions of Edwards and simplicity ought to take as their point of departure "the early modern debates and discussions of divine simplicity as Muller has unfolded them." In his chapter on excellency and simplicity in *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, Crisp agrees with McClymond, both on the importance of beginning with the simplicity tradition as articulated in Edwards's day as well as utilizing the ground-breaking work of Richard Muller to do so.[138] Thus, all sides of the Edwards-simplicity debate at least ostensibly agree that we ought to locate Edwards's understanding of the doctrine in relation to his own historical context. What's more, all sides want to enlist Richard Muller in defense of their reading of Edwards and the tradition. Thus, in this first chapter, I aim to accomplish three things. First, I will describe the doctrine of simplicity in its broadest and most basic form, as reflected in the medieval and Reformed scholastic tradition. Second, I will outline some of the variations within the divine simplicity tradition in relation to God's attributes, beginning with the medieval period and then moving to the post-Reformational period. Third, I will situate divine simplicity in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly the ways in which the persons of the Godhead are distinguished by the Reformed orthodox.

According to Muller, "the doctrine of divine simplicity is among the normative assumptions of theology from the time of the church fathers, to the age of the great medieval scholastic systems, to the era of Reformation and post-Reformation theology, and indeed, on into

[137] McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony," 75.

[138] Ironically, the same criticism that McClymond levels against Crisp might also be brought against Plantinga Pauw, whom McClymond is attempting to defend. Pauw draws her definition of divine simplicity, not directly from the theologians of the post-Reformation period, but from contemporary theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff.

the succeeding era of late orthodoxy and rationalism."[139] Nevertheless, among the Reformed themselves, there were "various understandings of simplicity," which were often connected to differences concerning the distinction of divine attributes. Importantly, however, "this debate took place entirely within the bounds of the confessions and does not appear to have been a matter of any angry controversy, so that it registers rather low on the decibel scale of seventeenth-century discussion."[140] What's more, debates among the Reformed orthodox largely followed the lines of difference set forth in the High Middle Ages among Thomists, Scotists, and nominalists. These lines of difference had to do with divine predication and whether attributes apply to the *ad intra* life of God or whether they are descriptions of his relations *ad extra*.

At its most basic, the doctrine of divine simplicity asserts that God is "absolutely free of any and all composition, not merely physical, but also rational or logical composition."[141] In his recent dissertation defending the doctrine, Stephen Duby defines it as "the teaching that God is not composed of parts but rather is identical with his own essence, existence, and attributes, each of which is identical with the whole being of the triune God considered under some aspect."[142] In both cases, the hallmark of the doctrine is the denial of *composition*, not, as some modern critics have suggested, the denial of *all distinction* within God. As Muller notes, "The various modern readings of simplicity as indicating an utter absence of distinction in the Godhead misinterpret the traditional doctrine."[143]

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[139] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:39.
[140] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:136.
[141] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 283.
[142] Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, vol. 30 of *T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 2.
[143] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:41.

Muller describes the doctrine of divine simplicity as "a governing concept which determines the way in which theology discusses the attributes and their relation to the divine essence."[144]

> Here we encounter the basic question of the difference between God and his creatures and of the relation of universals to God. Indeed, the question of the reality of universals and of the relation of universals to the object of which they are predicated defines the problem of the divine attributes: what are attributes when they are predicated of God? When we say God is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, just, good, loving, and so forth have we exhaustively described the divine essence? And in doing so, have we conceived of God in a composite way, as we conceive of creatures—as a sum of properties or parts? And is this description legitimate?[145]

Simplicity denies that God is the sum of properties, parts, or attributes. In the Middle Ages and among the Reformed orthodox, simplicity often appeared as the first divine attribute, since it was seen as "the guarantee of the absolute ultimacy and perfection of God."[146] By denying composition to God, simplicity asserts that there is nothing more fundamental than God, that he alone is ultimate reality. If God were composed or made up of anything more fundamental than himself, then he would lack this ultimacy. As James Dolezal puts it, "If God is not the ontological sufficient reason for himself and all other things then he is not God."[147]

Within these boundaries, classical theologians debated "the precise nature of the distinctions that, arguably, belong to the Godhead."[148] This question is almost universally divided into two distinct aspects: (1) Given divine simplicity, how do we distinguish God from his attributes, and the attributes among themselves? (2) Given divine simplicity, how do we

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[144] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:38.

[145] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:38–39.

[146] Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 283.

[147] James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 213.

[148] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:41. Muller notes that, during the seventeenth century, "the more subtle debate, often unaccompanied by any direct polemics, was among the orthodox writers themselves over the precise meaning of simplicity, specifically, over the question of whether or not there were distinctions of attributes or properties in God and, if so, of what sort these distinctions might be." See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:135–136.

distinguish persons from the essence, and the persons from each other?[149] These two questions are almost always treated separately in works of dogmatics, with the first question addressed under God's essence, and the second under the Trinity. Or again, the doctrine of God must be treated both under an absolute aspect and under a relative aspect. Duby helpfully summarizes:

> That which is absolute concerns God as God and without reference to anything else. In view of the singularity of God as God and of the divine essence, whatever is located under the absolute aspect is always singular and indivisible. Because the persons are each really identical with the one God himself in Holy Scripture and are distinguished in relation to one another, a relative aspect also must be registered in theology proper. That which is relative concerns the persons in relation to one another and hence according to their own peculiar, distinguishing characteristics and their consequents as displayed, for example, in the appropriation of certain opera ad extra to the Father, Son, or Spirit in keeping with their idiomatic taxis.[150]

Following that pattern, I will address the question of simplicity and God's attributes first, and then address simplicity in relation to the persons of the Trinity second, before turning to Edwards's answers to these questions in the next chapter.

According to Muller, beginning in the High Middle Ages, the varied answers to the question of the distinction among attributes began to resolve themselves into roughly three different lanes, represented by three central figures: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. All three men embraced divine simplicity, but they fleshed out its meaning in relation to attributes in different ways.

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[149] Muller writes, "With very few exceptions in the history of the doctrine, discussion of simplicity, in the context of the full *locus*, provides the place at which the datum of divine oneness is coordinated with one level of distinction *ad intra*, corresponding with the distinction of attributes, and another level of distinction *ad intra*, corresponding with the necessarily different distinctions among the three divine persons." See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:41–42. Later he writes that the traditional treatment of simplicity "always assumed that the denial of composition was made for the sake of right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the divine attributes." See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:297.

[150] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 228–229n139. In support of the absolute-relative distinction, Duby cites Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 40, art. 2, ad 2, p. 414; Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.1, 280. He further notes that we are required to use "reduplicative reasoning in theology: God must be considered as *Deus unus* and yet also as *Deus trinas* or *trinitas*."

1.1.1 Thomas Aquinas

For Aquinas, simplicity is fundamental to the doctrine of God. God is in no way composite, since all composites are posterior to their parts, and God is posterior to nothing and no one. Instead, God is totally and utterly simple (*totaliter simplex* and *omnino simplex*). Both of these stand in opposition to composition. However, God is not *absolutely* simple, since absolute simplicity (a phrase Aquinas does not use) would imply that there are no distinctions whatsoever in God.

Aquinas argues that there are no *real* distinctions in God, with the term "real" meaning "related to a thing or *res*." That is, in God there is no distinction between *res* and *res*, between thing and thing. At the same time, Aquinas acknowledges that there are genuine distinctions in God, and notes in particular the distinctions between the persons of the Godhead. "There must be a real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute—namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity—but according to that which is relative."[151] Paternity, filiation, and spiration are thus real (that is, genuine) *relative* distinctions, as opposed to real *essential* distinctions.

We'll return to the personal distinctions later in this chapter. But what about distinctions among attributes themselves, such as wisdom, justice, eternality, and so forth? Here Aquinas attempts to thread a tight needle. Distinctions among attributes are not real (essential/substantial) distinctions. Nor are they purely rational distinctions, found only in the mind of the human knower. Instead, they are rational distinctions with a foundation in the thing. Because God is the foundation of the finite order, the compound, complex, diverse finite order must, in some way, pre-exist in him. "All the perfections of things, which are in created things dividedly and

[151] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:54–55.

multiply, preexist in God unitedly."[152] Thus, "the attributes are distinct in God as the foundation of the things of the finite order, insofar as they preexist in God."[153] These perfections pre-exist in God "unitedly and simply" but are diversified through human analysis: the distinction results from human understanding of the simple God—a *ratio ratiocinata cum fundamento in re*. Later thinkers referred to this type of distinction as a virtual or eminent distinction. In the same way that an effect pre-exists virtually in its cause, so also the perfections of God must pre-exist in some manner in him.

The result is that Aquinas commends an essential identity among the attributes, but not an absolute identity. That is, when we predicate a perfection or attribute to God, the subject and predicate are not convertible. God is goodness, but goodness is not God. Thus, "the various names and attributes of God all "signify one thing" but they are, nonetheless, "not synonymous."[154] Significantly for our purposes, Muller highlights that, for Aquinas, the permissible distinctions in God "can be represented on the analogy of distinctions in the intellect."[155] Just "as in a human knower, 'the conception of the intellect, which is the intellectual likeness, is distinct from the knowing intellect,' so also 'the representation of the divine intellect, which is God's Word, is distinct from Him who produces the Word, not with respect to substantial existence, but only according to the procession of one from the other.'"[156]

[152] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 184, quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, in vol. 4 of *Opera Omnia*, *Editio Leonina* (Rome, 1888), Ia, qu. 13, art. 5, 146.
[153] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:55.
[154] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:57.
[155] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:58.
[156] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:57.

1.1.2 John Duns Scotus

Scotus's understanding of divine simplicity and the distinction of attributes may be regarded as both a critique and development of the Thomistic tradition. According to Muller, Scotus regarded the Thomistic distinction of attributes that are rooted in the divine essence, but not truly in it, and diversified through human analysis of God's relation to us as unacceptable. For Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, attribute distinctions rest on how composite creatures understand the infinite richness of the simple, non-composite essence. One way to pose Scotus's challenge is this: in the absence of a human knower, does God have attributes at all? Aquinas's paradigm might suggest that he would not, since distinct attributes are the result of human analysis, even if those distinctions have a foundation in the divine essence. In contrast, Scotus wishes to affirm that attributes are distinct in God, apart from a human knower, while simultaneously affirming divine simplicity (Scotus unambiguously denies that there is either composition or potency in God).

To do this, Scotus offers an additional type of distinction: the formal. He argues that, while the attributes of God are substantially and essentially the same in God, they are formally distinct. That is, they are distinct *as concepts*, but not *as things*. Infinite goodness is distinct from infinite power insofar as they are objects of thought (ideas or concepts). However, insofar as goodness and power are things, they are identical with the divine essence. Muller helpfully summarizes Scotus's position.

> God does not have attributes in the way that created objects have accidents or qualities—rather God as simple being, as the thing or object of theological consideration, has attributes which are each singly and all together identical with his essence, yet even with God these attributes are formally or objectively distinct. The distinction is formal, in that it truly exists between goodness and wisdom insofar as they are objects of thought but are "absolutely inseparable from the thing in which they are apprehended—they cannot exist

without the thing and the thing does not exist without them" and from the point of view of the thing itself they do not represent essential divisions or distinctions.[157]

Scotus's formal distinction is thus less ultimate than a real or essential distinction, but more significant and concrete than a rational distinction (even a rational distinction with a foundation in the thing).[158]

1.1.3 William of Ockham

William of Ockham's understanding of divine simplicity and distinction of attributes moved in the opposite direction of Scotus. For Ockham, "forms or ideas are not *in things* but only in the mind of the knower."[159] God's attributes are *our* finite conceptions of God *ad extra*. Ockham thus rejects all *ad intra* distinctions of attributes, whether of the Thomistic or Scotistic variety. For him, essential identity rules out formal or rational distinction in God (while retaining these distinctions in the mind of the finite knower). Thus, in some ways, to speak of "divine attributes" is misleading, since it implies that distinct attributes in some real way inhere in God. Instead, Ockham hearkens back to the older Christian tradition of the divine names, which again places distinctions of attributes/names in the realm of the finite, composite human knower.

Ockham's nominalism, however, does raise challenges for what we are doing when we predicate an attribute of God. When we say, "God is good," Ockham argues that "God" is a reality and "good" is a term or name. Terms have no independent reality of their own. Terms are suppositions about things; they stand for something else, and, in the case of personal

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[157] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:73.

[158] Muller notes that later defenders of Thomas's position such as John of Paris and Cajetan deny that Aquinas leaves God devoid of attributes in the absence of a finite subject to distinguish them. Instead, the distinction of attributes *ratio ratiocinata* seems to be roughly equivalent to Scotus's formal distinction. In this way, Scotus's thought may be regarded as a critique of an ambiguity in Aquinas's thought as well as a development of Aquinas's thought. See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:74.

[159] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:74.

suppositions, signify that which they stand for. "In Ockham's doctrine, the attributes are only a series of diverse names applied to God by the finite intellect—in himself, in the divine reality there is 'one perfection without real or rational distinction.'"[160]

Ockham's doctrine of divine simplicity, then, is more radical than either that of Aquinas or Scotus. By locating all distinctions of attributes solely in the mind of the finite subject, he posits a version of simplicity that actually approaches that which is attacked by many modern critics. So radical is Ockham's doctrine of divine simplicity that he is only able to preserve the doctrine of the Trinity (with its modal or real relative distinctions in God) by an appeal to mystery. In the case of these relative distinctions, faith upholds what reason cannot penetrate.

To conclude, Duby helpfully summarizes the variations within the simplicity tradition at the end of the Middle Ages.

> The medieval era thus yields at least three distinct ways of construing God's simplicity with respect to the divine attributes. The Thomistic route insists that the distinctions among the attributes are discerned by analysis of the essence itself (*ratio ratiocinata*) and have an objective foundation in God or at least in God's works (*fundamentum in re*). Scotus goes further and attempts to locate the *fundamentum* in formal distinctions among the attributes in God himself. Ockham rejects both the Thomistic and the Scotist views as betrayals of divine simplicity, repudiating the distinction arising *ex ratione ratiocinata* and the Scotist formal distinction and positing a purely conceptual and subjective distinction.[161]

1.1.4 William Ames

We turn now to the post-Reformation theologians who most influenced Edwards. "Edwards was well-versed in the Western church's teachings on the Trinity through the writings of Reformed scholastics such as Francis Turretin and Peter van Mastricht and Puritan writers like William Ames."[162] We begin with Ames. With respect to his doctrine of divine simplicity and the

[160] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:75.
[161] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 17.
[162] *WJE* 21:3.

attributes of God, Ames begins with a clear statement of divine incomprehensibility. "God, as he is in himself, cannot be understood by any save himself." Human beings know God "from the back, so to speak, not from the face…darkly, not clearly, so far as we and our ways are concerned."[163] This distinction, between knowledge of God in himself and our knowledge of God, is often called the archetypal-ectypal distinction, "the epistemological corollary of the Creator-creature distinction."[164] Ectypal knowledge is "frequently" anthropopathic; divine things are explained "in a human way," "according to our own conceiving rather than according to his real nature."[165]

According to Ames, revealed, ectypal knowledge of God may be divided into God's sufficiency and God's efficiency. God's sufficiency is "his quality of being sufficient in himself and for us." His efficiency is his "working power" or "that by which he works all things in all things." Muller states that the sufficiency-efficiency classification is similar to the absolute-relative classification, with absolute "describing God as he is in himself apart from any relation to the creature," and relative "describing God in his relations *ad extra.*"[166] God's sufficiency is both in his essence and his subsistence.

Ames proceeds to describe the divine essence by beginning with the divine name Jehovah.[167] From this divine name, Ames derives God's unity, aseity, and immutability. This

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[163] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 1.4.2–3, 83, citing 1 Tim. 6:16.

[164] Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 17.

[165] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.4.4–5, 83. Ames suggestively qualifies his statements about anthropopathy: it is "frequently used"; "many things" are said according to our way of conceiving. This leaves open the possibility that some things are spoken of God "according to his real nature," though Ames does not specify what those might be. Perhaps he means no more than what he says in 1.IV.32: "What God is no one can perfectly define except one who possesses the mind of God himself. But an imperfect description follows which we can understand and which comes close to explaining the nature of God" (85).

[166] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:217. Muller cites Leigh and Owen as proponents of this classification system. On which, see chapter 5.

[167] Muller identifies Zanchi as a key figure in establishing the pattern among the Reformed orthodox of beginning with the divine names before discussing divine attributes. See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:217.

singular, incomprehensible essence is revealed to finite minds "as manifold, that is to say, as if consisting of many attributes." Thus, the distinctions among attributes that we identify is an accommodation to our finite capacities. God's single, simple, non-composite essence is refracted, as it were, into many attributes so that creatures may know their Creator. Ames contends that we refer to these variegated predicates as attributes, because, properly speaking, they are *attributed* to God rather than being literally *in* him. In truth, these manifold attributes are nothing other than God's act—"single, most pure, most simple." Here Ames affirms a crucial corollary of divine simplicity, namely that God is *actus purus*. That is, properly speaking, God has no potency, but is wholly act. Thus, in his treatment of God's efficiency, he writes, "Practically speaking the effecting, working, or acting of God, insofar as they are God in action, are not other than God himself. For no compositeness or mutation of power and action can have a place in God's perfectly simple and immutable nature." Or again, "Practically speaking, we say that God possesses power because he has an ability to communicate something to others, having the potency of a cause. But properly speaking, in respect of himself, active power does not apply to God, for it implies that he was at first idle and later moved himself into act. God is rather most pure act."

From the datum of divine simplicity and *actus purus*, Ames derives a number of important propositions.[168] First, attributes apply to God in the abstract and the concrete. That is, God is both good (concrete) and goodness itself (abstract).[169] Second, Ames articulates the distinction between communicable and incommunicable attributes, with communicable attributes belonging first to God and then to creatures substantively, even if the names for the attributes are taken from creatures first and then applied to God. Later he notes that formal attributes that

[168] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.4.21–30, 84–85.
[169] See Leigh, *Treatise* II.I, 21-22, as cited in Muller, *PRRD*, 3:202.

"belong to the divine essence, such as omnipotence, immensity, eternity, and the like, are completely incommunicable." What's more, even communicable attributes are only communicated "by analogy, not in the same mode nor with the same meaning as they are said to exist in God." Third, all attributes are equal in God. Fourth, all attributes agree emphatically with one another. Fifth, all attributes are divine perfections. Sixth, attributes are in God virtually, eminently, and formally. These distinctions are "less-than-essential distinctions within an essence or, indeed, within a thing, such as the formal distinctions between the woodiness and the hardness of a table, or the formal distinctions between the volitional and the intellectual capacities of a human being."[170] Thus, these sorts of distinctions do not compromise the simplicity of God. In particular, an attribute that is in God virtually belongs "not to the primary actuality of a thing, but to its potency or power." An eminent distinction "identifies the causal foundation or ground in one thing of some other thing, effect, or attribute outside of the thing itself." The formal distinction identifies a quality that "belongs to the primary actuality of a substance or essence."[171] Significantly, both the virtual and eminent distinction depend on some relation between God who possesses the attribute and some other thing outside of God, with virtual accenting the "*ad extra* exercise of power," and eminent accenting the "*ad intra* causal foundation." Additionally, Ames is adamant that, in speaking of attributes being formally in God, they are not in God in the way that qualities exist in creatures.

Drawing on Aquinas and a number of Reformed Scholastics, Steven Duby helpfully explains the virtual, eminent, and formal distinctions. As we saw in our summary of Aquinas, God's simplicity is a fullness of life that contains "all perfections which are in all genera." Thus, "the divine essence contains the distinct and individual attributes *virtualiter* and *eminenter*. That

[170] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:286.
[171] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:287.

is, the essence is capacious of producing various works whose diverse characters are traceable to attributes of diverse *rationes formales ad nos* even as these attributes are materially and formally identical as a *virtus eminens* in God himself, which is God's own plenitude and fecundity. The attributes, then, are distinct *virtualiter* or *eminenter* in that God's singular, multi-dimensional capacity (*virtus eminens*) yields the *opera Dei ad extra* which set forth the distinct *ratio formalis* of each attribute to our conception."[172] In other words, God's fullness of life produces works outside of God (such as creation) which establish the boundaries of each attribute to our finite minds. At the same time, these attributes are materially and formally identical to God's own simple and all-sufficient essence.

Returning to Ames's propositions, the virtual, eminent, and formal distinctions lead us to see God's attributes as "a kind of secondary essence, because they do not belong to the formal divine essence."[173] This secondary essence, by which God can be classed with other beings in a genus, is effectively generated by our way of conceiving, since "we conceive God to be, before we are able to think of him as just and good." That is, our finite inability to comprehend God in his simplicity yields a distinction for us between God's existence and his attributes. Finally, Ames, following Thomas and against Ockham, insists that rational distinctions between God's essence and his attributes and between attributes and each other are not merely the result of human reasoning (*ratio rationans*) but also *ratio ratiocinata cum fundamento in re*.

In summary, Ames first adopts a clear distinction between God's absolute sufficiency in himself and God's relative efficiency in relation to creation. The sufficiency of God is in his essence, and his essence is indicated by the divine name Jehovah. From this essential priority and

[172] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 184.

[173] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 85. On the distinction between primary and secondary essence, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:242n78.

all-sufficiency, Ames derives three attributes of God: God's unity, aseity, and immutability. Though we explain the divine essence in terms of manifold attributes such as these, this explanation is simply an act of accommodation and condescension on God's part to our finite capacities. After insisting on divine simplicity and *actus purus*, he makes us of other attribute classifications: communicable-incommunicable, as well as virtual, eminent, and formal, following "a more or less late Thomistic pattern of argument."[174]

1.1.5 Francis Turretin

In many respects, Turretin's treatment of divine simplicity and attribute distinctions is similar to Ames. He affirms the essential numerical unity of God (while still affirming personal distinctions). In his treatment of the divine names, he emphasizes Jehovah and derives three interconnected truths from the name: the eternity and independence of God, the causative and efficient power of God, and the immutability and constancy of God.[175] With respect to God's attributes, Turretin also posits virtual, eminent, and formal distinctions, while affirming in clear terms the doctrine of divine simplicity.

At the same time, owing to the polemical nature of his work, Turretin is far more thorough than Ames's treatment of these matters. Turretin defines God's absolute simplicity as "his incommunicable attribute by which the divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also as incapable of composition and divisibility."[176] As with the medieval tradition, simplicity rules out all species of composition—whether corporeal (matter and form), logical (genus and species), metaphysical (act and potency), of quantitative parts, of subject and accident, and of essence and existence. Simplicity is one of a cluster of

[174] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:296–297.
[175] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.4.5, 184–185.
[176] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.3, 191.

inter-related doctrines, implied in the fact that God is independent, *a se*, one, perfect (and thus free of passivity and mutability), and *actus purus*. At the same time, simplicity is perfectly compatible with the Trinity, since modes (such as subsistences) do not compose, but only modify.

When it comes to attribute distinctions, Turretin, like Ames, prefaces his discussion by recourse to divine incomprehensibility and human finitude. Turretin has a developed sense of human inadequacy in comprehending God. Distinct attributes represent the nature of God "inadequately (i.e., not according to its total relation, but now under this perfection, then under another). For what we cannot take in by one adequate conception as being finite, we divide into various inadequate conceptions so as to obtain some knowledge of him (which is not a proof of error in the intellect, but only of imperfection)." Muller helpfully explains Turretin's notion of inadequacy.

> By "inadequate" he does not mean either unsuitable or capable of being improved upon in any way. His point rests on the broadly Aristotelian definition of truth as "the adequation of the mind to the thing," i.e., the establishment of a conceptual likeness in it of the mind to the form of the thing known. In the case of God, such "adequation" is impossible inasmuch as there can be no proportion between infinite God and the finite mind. Our thoughts cannot be adequated to the divine reality—they necessarily remain "inadequate."[177]

In other words, as finite creatures, we require multiple lenses or aspects in order to know and understand the fertile and simple nature of God. Through an act of "precisive abstraction," we come to distinguish goodness from power and thus have the essence of God inadequately represented to us as good and powerful.[178]

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[177] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:204–205.

[178] Turretin insists that this act of abstraction is "simple and negative" not "exclusive or privative." By this he means that we are permitted to abstract power from God's other attributes, but we are not free to ascribe power to God apart from his other attributes. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.5.4, 188.

Like Ames, Turretin embraces virtual, eminent, and formal distinctions in God. However, Muller argues that Turretin adopts a "slightly Scotistic accent" by the way that he develops these distinctions. "To be distinguished virtually is nothing else than either by virtue to contain distinct effects, or to have unitedly in themselves what are distinct in others, or to have an eminent virtue which can be the principal of diverse actions."[179] The foundation of the distinction is not intrinsic, but extrinsic, in relation to the end or object in view. The diverse formal conceptions are then formed according to the diversity of operations and effects. In other words, formal distinctions (such as between the concept or idea of goodness and the concept or idea of power) are rooted in the diverse operations and effects of God outside of himself, all of which are produced by the simple divine essence. Thus, formal distinctions and virtual/eminent distinctions are demonstrated reciprocally. In the order of being, the simple divine essence produces diverse effects which then form diverse formal conceptions in our minds. In the order of human knowing, the order is reversed. When speaking of the simple divine essence, the presence of distinct formal conceptions in our mind necessarily testifies to the existence of virtual and eminent distinctions.[180] The fact that we give distinct formal definitions and explanations of attributes of the simple God means that they must be virtually distinguished from each other and from the divine essence itself. Our formal conceptions answer to diverse, objective conceptions, which are actually "indivisible…in God on account of his most perfect simplicity, but yet virtually and eminently distinct."[181]

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[179] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.5.6, 188.

[180] "Where there is ground for founding distinct formal conceptions of anything (although one and simple in itself considered), there we must necessarily grant virtual and eminent distinction. Since therefore in the most simple divine essence there is ground for forming diverse formal conceptions concerning the divine perfections (which is evident from their distinct definition and explanation), it is best to say that these attributes giving rise to such conceptions are virtually to be distinguished both from the essence and from each other." Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.5.8, 188.

[181] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.5.10, 188–189.

Thus, for Turretin, we may mutually predicate attributes of each other in as much as we are regarding them as united in the simple God. However, we may not formally identify the attributes with each other. The *concept* of justice and the *concept* of mercy must remain formally distinct. The following quotation brings together the boundaries of what we may say and what we may not say about the attributes of God, grounding these boundaries in human finitude and divine perfection.

> He who conceives what is actually and really one and simple in God as actually and really diverse, conceives what is false. But he who conceives that which is actually one in itself as more than one virtually and extrinsically or objectively, does not conceive what is false. Rather he conceives the thing imperfectly and inadequately on account of the weakness of the human intellect and the eminence and perfection of the divine nature.[182]

Turretin also adopts the absolute-relative distinction (God as he is in himself and God in relation to his creatures) and the communicable-incommunicable distinction.[183] With respect to the latter, Turretin argues that, speaking essentially and formally, all of God's attributes are incommunicable. Speaking analogically and by resemblance, God can and does communicate some of his attributes by producing in creatures effects analogous to his own properties. Thus, Turretin relies on a strong doctrine of analogical predication (and a correspondingly strong rejection of univocal and equivocal predication) in order to preserve communicable attributes.

Finally, Turretin, argues that knowledge of God and his attributes is acquired according to "the threefold way of causality, eminence, and negation."[184] When we infer the cause from the effects, and ascend from second causes to the first, we acquire knowledge *via causalitas.* "By way of eminence (*via eminentiae*), we eminently ascribe to God whatever of perfection there is in creatures. By way of negation (*via negativa*), we remove from him whatever is imperfect in

[182] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.5.12, 189.
[183] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.6.2–4, 190.
[184] Muller notes that the *via negativa* and *via eminentiae* is found in many medieval theologians, with Durandus responsible for adding the *via causalitatis*. See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:63.

creatures, as when he is said to be invisible, immortal, immutable."[185] The way of negation gives us God's negative attributes; the way of eminence gives us positive attributes; the way of causation gives us relative attributes.

1.1.6 Peter van Mastricht

Mastricht's approach to attributes is very similar to both Ames and Turretin.[186] After treating the knowledge of God and the divine names, Mastricht addresses the attributes of God in general. God's essence is in itself invisible and imperceptible to creatures, but is made known to us through attributes.[187] Drawing on God's revelation to Moses in Exodus, Mastricht argues that we are unable to see God's face directly, but we can, like Moses, know him "from the back," by which he means that we may know him through his attributes (such as glory, goodness, mercy, and justice). Attributes do not inhere in God as accidents or qualities, but instead are attributed to him by us, through various concepts which are inadequate to fully comprehend and explain the divine essence. Nevertheless, such attributes are truly predicated of him, are in his essence, or, better, *are* his essence. In the same way that human beings cannot consider the whole horizon in one single glance but instead must look east, west, north, and south, so also God's single infinite perfection enters our minds through parts in various inadequate concepts.[188] We come to these attributes through the three ways of the *via causalitatis, via negationis*, and *via eminentiae*.[189]

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[185] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.2.8, 179; See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:166.

[186] For an extensive treatment of Mastricht's doctrine of God in its Reformed scholastic contrast, see Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht: Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety*, vol. 35 of *Brill's Series in Church History* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For Mastricht's view of divine spirituality and simplicity, see Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht*, 221–44.

[187] Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 1724, 2.5.3, 93.

[188] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.5, 93.

[189] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:217–24.

Mastricht insists that all of these attributes are in God in one single, most simple, and most pure act.[190] Divine simplicity is fundamentally a denial of composition, since attributing composition to God would entail that he is not the first and ultimate being, that he is finite, and that he is mutable. In other words, as we have seen elsewhere, divine simplicity is clustered with a number of other attributes such as infinitude, immutability, and primacy.

In light of divine simplicity, God's attributes do not differ from each other as distinct parts of God, nor as distinct things (*res*) in God, but instead are distinguished through a process of reasoning from God's distinct works to distinct attributes which are in God virtually, eminently, and formally. They are in God virtually, in the way that heat is in the sun, eminently, in the way that the perfection of an effect belongs to its cause, and formally, in that the attributes are distinct concepts according to our way of conceiving.[191] Such attributes belong to God both in the concrete (God is good) and the abstract (God is goodness). Attributes belong to God first and perfectly, even if the names which signify the attributes belong to us first and are then transferred to God with all imperfection removed.[192] All of God's attributes are perfections, and there can be no true contrariety or enmity between God's attributes; all such apparent tension between God's attributes (such as justice and mercy) is owing wholly to the object around which the attribute of God is occupied.

When it comes to categorizing attributes, Mastricht offers a number of alternatives, some of which are nested within each other.[193] He divides attributes into proper attributes and metaphorical attributes (including terms such as "lion," "rock," and "fire"). Attributes may be either positive (omnipotence, omniscience) or negative (independence, infinity, immutability),

[190] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.6, 93.
[191] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.7, 94.
[192] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.7, 94.
[193] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.8, 94–95.

even if the negative attributes signify a positive perfection in God. Within God's positive attributes, we may further distinguish between absolute attributes and relative attributes (such as being a creator). Mastricht also suggests distinguishing attributes into personal (such as the generation of the Son) and natural. Natural attributes may be further divided into communicable and incommunicable. However, Mastricht insists that the communicable attributes are only predicated of God analogically, and not univocally or equally with creatures.

Additionally, Mastricht offers a qualification of the traditional communicable-incommunicable distinction, commending a tripartite division of attributes based on three questions: Quid, Quantus, and Qualis, or "What," "How great," and "Of what sort."[194] In the first, he includes God's essential properties, such as spirituality, simplicity, and immutability. In the second, he includes divine oneness, infinity, greatness, immensity, eternality, and omnipresence. In the last, he includes attributes of intellect, will, and the affections (which are often included in the relative or communicable attributes). Muller contends that this classification scheme is not opposed to the communicable-incommunicable distinction, but is instead a qualification of the traditional taxonomy.[195]

1.2 Divine Simplicity and the Trinity

We turn now to address the second question provoked by the doctrine of divine simplicity: Given simplicity, how do we distinguish the divine persons from the divine essence, and how do we distinguish the persons from each other? The first thing worth noting is that the classical tradition, whether in the medieval, Reformation, or post-Reformation eras, saw no contradiction between affirmations of divine simplicity and affirmations of personal distinctions

[194] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.5.9, 95.
[195] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:222.

in God. “Contrary to the claim that divine simplicity is inimical to all species of distinction, proponents like Thomas, Zanchi, Turretin, Mastricht, and others carefully uphold that God’s being is free from real and formal distinctions and yet, under the relative aspect, includes modal and even real relative distinctions.”[196] Indeed, they hardly recognized a tension between them, but instead propounded divine simplicity as a way of establishing the unity of the triune God.[197]

Turretin’s discussion of this question is particularly useful for its thoroughness and engagement with the historical tradition. His discussion of the Trinity follows his discussion of the divine essence; “the absolute consideration of God begets the relative.”[198] As we saw earlier, we must make use of reduplicative reasoning in our discussion of God, considering him as one God, and then again as three persons. Turretin’s treatment of the doctrine of God under the relative aspect begins with careful definitions of key terms, including essence, substance, subsistence, *hypostasis*, person, *homoousian,* and emperichoresis. Important for our purposes, he follows the traditional, medieval outline in establishing three key terms for the doctrine: property, relation, and notion. “Property denotes the peculiar mode of subsisting and diacritical character by which this or that person is constituted in his personal being and is distinguished from the others.”[199] The three properties—paternity, filiation, and procession—constitute the persons in their unique modes of subsisting. The term “relation” “intimates the same property

[196] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 226. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.9, 193.

[197] This is why Oliver Crisp’s closing question in his chapter on Edwards and divine simplicity in *Engaging the Doctrine of God* is so problematic. “The most pressing [question] is this: can we hold a traditional doctrine of divine simplicity *and* have a thoroughly orthodox trinitarian theology?” Crisp, “Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity,” 103. The problem with this question is that, historically speaking, *there is no* orthodox trinitarian theology without the doctrine of divine simplicity, no matter what trouble contemporary philosophers have with it.

[198] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.1, 253. It is important to distinguish this use of absolute and relative, from the absolute-relative distinction in relation to attributes. With the latter, “absolute” refers to God as he is in himself, whereas “relative” refers to God’s relation to creation. However, even within God’s absolute reality (what Ames calls his sufficiency), we can distinguish two aspects—the absolute (in which we treat God’s essence) and the relative (in which we treat the three subsistences in God). Put another way, the word “relative” may be used of God’s *ad intra* relations which distinguish the persons, as well as his *ad extra* relation to creation.

[199] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.14, 255.

inasmuch as it indicates the relation of one person to another." Relations view the personal properties "in the very specific sense of the way in which the distinct subsistences (and their *proprietates*) relate to one another."[200] Relations thus move from one pole of the relation to another along a particular vector. Father to Son is paternity; Son to Father is filiation. Father and Son to Spirit is active spiration; Spirit to Father and Son is passive spiration. There are thus four relations in God. Finally, notion "designates the same character inasmuch as it signifies that one person is distinct from another (so as to be the index and mark of distinction between the persons)."[201] There are five notions—unbegottenness, paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration. Thus, the full terms of the doctrine are one essence, two processions, three personal properties, four relations, and five notions.[202] Having established his terms, Turretin then demonstrates that the Trinity is a fundamental article of faith (Question 24), establishes that there are three persons in the one essence (Question 25), proves the Trinity from the Old Testament (Question 26), before turning to the important question that is before us: how can we distinguish the persons from the essence and from each other (Question 27)?

He begins by drawing attention to the obvious distinction between the persons and the essence. "The persons are manifestly distinct from the essence because the essence is one only, while the persons are three."[203] He lists a number of other qualities by which they are distinguished. The essence is absolute, communicable as to identity, broader than the persons, and "the common principle of external operations, which are undivided." The persons, on the other hand, are relative, incommunicable, narrower than the essence (since, though each person

[200] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:187.
[201] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.14, 255.
[202] Muller notes this schema in Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, 1a, qq. 27, 28, 29, 30, 32. See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:45.
[203] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.1, 278.

possesses the whole divinity, it does not exclude the others from also possessing the whole divinity), and the principle of internal operations. Turretin notes that different theologians have defined this distinction in different ways: real, formal, virtual, eminent, personal, and modal. Given the incomprehensibility of the subject, Turretin discourages any polemics over the precise term, and instead urges others to "be satisfied with this general notion that there is a distinction."

At the same time, Turretin prefers the use of the modal distinction, since "the personal properties by which the persons are distinguished from the essence are certain modes by which it is characterized…Thus the person may be said to differ from the essence not really (*realiter*), i.e. essentially (*essentialiter*) as thing and thing, but modally (*modaliter*)—as a mode from the thing (*modus a re*)."[204] A modal distinction does not violate divine simplicity "because composition arises only from diverse things." In an earlier section, Turretin notes, "Composition is in that in which there is more than one real entity, but not where there is only more than one mode because modes only modify and characterize, but do not compose the essence."[205]

These modal and relative distinctions differ from attribute distinctions in that the divine attributes (which are distinguished virtually, eminently, and/or formally) are essential and absolute and thus identical to God himself. The persons, on the other hand, being distinguished by relative and modal distinctions "may not immediately in every way be identified with the divine essence." A divine person is God "in the concrete, but not in the abstract." We may say God the Father or God the Son or God the Holy Spirit, but we cannot say that the Father is the divinity itself in such a way as to exclude the other persons. With respect to God's essential

[204] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.3, 278. Mastricht, on the other hand, prefers to call it a rational distinction, but one that is "not merely in the mind of the finite knower, but *in ipsa re*, that is, in the Godhead or divine essence itself." See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:191, citing Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.24, 8. For an extensive treatment of Mastricht's doctrine of the Trinity, see Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht*, 245–78.

[205] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.8, 192–193. Likewise, "modes (such as subsistences) [do not] compose, they only modify." Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.5, 192.

attributes, we may say that "God is good" (concrete) and "God is goodness" (abstract). But with respect to the three persons, we may say that "the Son is God" (concrete), but we may not say that "the Son is God-nesss or divinity" (abstract), since the Father is also God.

Turning to how we distinguish the persons from each other, Turretin notes that this involves a greater distinction than simply distinguishing the persons from the essence. There is no opposition between the person and the essence, but there *is* an opposition between the persons and each other, since "the persons cannot be mutually predicated of each other, for the Father cannot be called the Son or the Son the Father."[206]

In distinguishing the persons from each other, Turretin, along with other Reformed scholastics, is at pains to avoid two extremes—Sabellianism, which argues that God is truly only one person who is rationally distinguished into three persons because of various effects in the history of redemption, and tritheism, which made the persons essentially distinct and unequal from each other.[207] Different authors proposed different terms, depending on which error was primarily in view. Mastricht notes that, when faced with the Sabellian heresy, some authors argue for a real distinction between the persons, though not a distinction that renders them separate essences.[208] Other authors, more concerned with prospect of tritheism, distinguish the persons modally (*modaliter*).[209] Turretin is representative of this line of thinking: "As the persons are

[206] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.8, 279.

[207] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.9–10, 279. See the discussion in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Triunity of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:191.

[208] Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.24.9. Muller notes that this solution—a real distinction between the persons (as *res* and *res*), coupled with a rational distinction between persons and essence—begins as early as Alexander of Hales. See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:193. For example, Zanchi insisted that the persons are distinct "truly and really" but not "essentially."

[209] Muller helpfully notes that the use of the term "modal" does not amount to the heresy of Sabellianism (otherwise known as modalism). When the orthodox use the term modal, they use it of the *ad intra* modal distinctions; when modalists use the term, they refer to the *ad extra* modes of self-presentation. See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:193.

constituted by personal properties as incommunicable modes of subsisting, so they may properly be said to be distinguished by them."[210]

So the Reformed middle ground in distinguishing the persons from each other is to posit a distinction that is greater than a merely rational one, but is less than an essential one. Some call this a real distinction; others a modal distinction. But, Turretin notes, this is merely a semantic difference and the differences are easily reconciled. Those who urge a real distinction commend a real *minor* distinction, not a real *major* distinction.[211] The former "coincides with the modal distinction held by others," since it distinguishes a thing and the modes of the thing or between the modes themselves. The latter posits a distinction between a thing and another thing, and thus is rejected in order to preserve the unity of the divine essence. Thus, for Turretin, the modal and the real minor distinction are different ways of expressing the same reality.[212]

Finally, for our purposes, Turretin argues that "as to each person there is a peculiar subsistence and a peculiar property, so also to them singly there is a peculiar relation."[213] These relations do not constitute the persons, but declare them *a posteriori*. This is because the Father may be said to have two relations—paternity and spiration—but is not thereby two persons, since he shares the latter relation in common with the Son. As Turretin says, "only the opposed relations here make the distinction."[214]

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[210] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.10, 279.

[211] Muller notes that this is the solution favored by Marckius, and that it corresponds to Aquinas's "real distinction of relational opposition." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:193.

[212] Muller notes one challenge to using the same term (modal) to distinguish the persons from the essence, and the persons from each other. If the distinction between the persons and essences is called modal, and if the distinction between person and person is also called modal, then how can we (as Turretin does) say that the latter distinction is "greater" than the former? Thus, argues Muller, if we distinguish the persons from the essence modally, then a different term is needed to distinguish the persons from each other, since the persons cannot be mutually predicated of each other in the way that the persons and essence can (with appropriate qualifications). Thus, Mastricht states his preference for "real modal" or simply "personal" as a way of distinguishing the persons from each other.

[213] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.18, 281.

[214] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.18–19, 281. In this Turretin appears to be very similar to Aquinas. Aquinas differentiated the distinction between persons from the distinction between attributes by noting that the former stand

1.3 Summary

We may summarize the foregoing discussion of divine simplicity in the medieval and Reformed scholastic traditions under six heads.

1) Classical theologians have almost universally regarded divine simplicity as a given feature of the doctrine of God. What's more, far from regarding it as in tension with the doctrine of the Trinity, these theologians have regarded divine simplicity as an essential component of the doctrine, preserving the divine unity of the triune God.[215]

2) With few exceptions, divine simplicity has never ruled out all distinctions in God. Instead, it has preserved God's freedom from composition. Simplicity rules out all species of composition—whether corporeal (matter and form), logical (genus and species), metaphysical (act and potency), of quantitative parts, of subject and accident, and of essence and existence. But there is space within the doctrine of divine simplicity to make various other kinds of distinctions.

3) Most theologians have commended two primary types or levels of distinction within God. Muller succinctly states the point.

> With very few exceptions in the history of the doctrine, discussion of simplicity, in the context of the full locus, provides the place at which the datum of divine oneness is

in conceptual opposition to each other. Attribute distinctions (such as power and goodness) do not produce this conceptual opposition. In other words, "since the relations are in God *realiter* and are in relative (but not essential or substantial) opposition to one another, there is a real distinction in God, albeit one that is not according to the thing or substance absolutely considered (*secundum rem absolutam*) but according to the thing or substance relatively considered (*secundum rem relativam).*" Similarly, earlier thinkers like Anselm and Albert the Great argued that a divine person "was to be distinguished by a relation of opposition, specifically a 'relation of origin.' (Muller, *PRRD*, 4:40.). Tan cites Emery who warns us that the term "relation of opposition" used in reference to Aquinas is inaccurate. Instead Aquinas used terms like "relative opposition," "opposition of relations," "opposed relations," "mutually opposed relations," or "relations which have a mutual opposition." Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 199, cited in Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 48.

[215] So Muller: "Virtually all theologians we will examine on this point, whether medieval scholastics like Aquinas, Reformers like Calvin and Musculus, or subsequent Protestant scholastic writers like Perkins, Turretin, Howe, and Rijssen, held to the patristic assumption that, far from contradicting the doctrine of the Trinity, the notion of divine simplicity offered profound support to an orthodox doctrine of the triune God." Muller, *PRRD*, 3:298.

> coordinated with one level of distinction *ad intra*, corresponding with the distinction of attributes, and another level of distinction *ad intra*, corresponding with the necessarily different distinctions among the three divine persons."[216]

Moreover, methodologically, most theologians proceed from God's essence to God's subsistences, treating the attributes of God within the *loci* of the divine essence, and treating the personal distinctions within the *loci* of the divine subsistence.

4) One level of distinction lies within the absolute aspect in which we seek to speak of God in terms of the single divine essence. At this level, theologians have posited various kinds of distinctions between God and his attributes and between the attributes themselves: a *rational* distinction with a foundation in the thing (Aquinas), a *formal* distinction between concepts (Scotus), a merely *rational* distinction in the mind of the human knower (Ockham), a *virtual* or *eminent* distinction derived from God's works *ad extra* (Ames, Turretin, and Mastricht). Other types of distinctions appear as well—communicable-incommunicable, absolute-relative, among others.

5) The other level of distinction is within the relative aspect in which we seek to speak of God in terms of his subsistences. At this level, the classical tradition has distinguished persons from the divine essence *modally*, because the three persons are constituted as incommunicable modes of subsistence of the one divine essence. Similarly, theologians have distinguished the persons from each other *modally*, or, in order to use a different term, have posited a *real minor* distinction (Aquinas) or a *real modal* distinction (Mastricht) or simply a *personal* distinction. Importantly, the relative level of distinction differs from the absolute level, because the absolute

[216] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:41–42. Elsewhere, Muller writes, "The point had arisen in medieval scholastic discussion that the distinguishing characteristics of the three divine persons were of a different order than the divine attributes properly so called: the attributes belong equally and indivisibly to the three divine persons, inasmuch as the three are coessential in the undivided deity of the Godhead—but the *proprietates personales* are the characteristics that distinguish the three persons one from another, "personally" but not essentially." See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:215.

distinctions do not produce conceptual oppositions in the way that the the *ad intra* relative distinctions do.

6) While affirmation of divine simplicity is a given for orthodox divines, within the tradition there is plenty of room for debate and discussion regarding the precise terms and nature of the distinctions within the one, simple God. Again, the precise nature and terms of the distinctions were not regarded as confessional matters, whereas affirmation of a single, simple divine essence as well as some way of distinguishing the three persons was regarded as a necessary component of orthodox theology, separating the orthodox from Socinians, tri-theists, Sabellians, and other heretics.

CHAPTER 2 JONATHAN EDWARDS ON DIVINE SIMPLICITY

2.1 Introduction

With this background, we turn now to examine Edwards's understanding of divine simplicity. Much of the debate over Edwards's views revolves around a few important passages in his *Discourse on the Trinity*. Given the centrality of this text, we will examine the entirety of the *Discourse* in the next two chapters. However, before turning to it, we will see what light Edwards's sermons, miscellanies, and other major works shed on his understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

2.2 Early Evidence: Sermons and Notes

To begin, Edwards never gives an extended treatment of the subject such as we find in Turretin or Mastricht. References to divine simplicity and its related doctrines, however, do appear in a number of places in his corpus, from the beginning of his ministry to its conclusion. In an early sermon on God's righteousness and judgments from Deuteronomy 32:4, Edwards employs simplicity to coordinate God's righteousness with God's nature and essence.

> As to the nature of the righteousness of God, it may be thus defined as a necessary and unchangeable disposition of the divine nature to render to every one their own. It is not in strictness different from the divine nature and essence itself, but only in our way of conception. Being and disposition or inclination are not different in God. In ourselves we distinguish between our souls and the disposition or inclination of our souls. The one is a substance; the other an accident or property of that substance. But there is no distinction in God of substance and property. [Such a distinction] is opposed to the simplicity of God's nature, whereby all that is in God is God. God is all thought and he is all love and all joy. All that disposition which we call justice and all that disposition which we call mercy is indeed the same disposition in God. He is an infinitely powerful love. He is an infinitely wise justice. He is an all comprehensive and simple and unchangeable thought or idea.
>
> Those attributes of holiness, faithfulness, and justice of God are near akin in our manner of conceiving. We conceive of his justice as being a part of his holiness, and of

> his faithfulness as being part of his justice. They are all comprehended in that more general disposition of doing those things that are pure, amiable, and right.[217]

This passage displays a number of affinities with the classical tradition of divine simplicity. First, God's attributes are strictly identical to the divine nature and essence itself. Attribute distinctions are according to our finite "way of conception." Thus, Edwards, like Ames, Turretin, and other Reformed scholastics, distinguishes finite human knowledge of God from the ineffable and incomprehensible mystery of God's essence. Second, Edwards denies that God is composed of substance and accidents or properties.[218] "There is no distinction in God of substance and property."[219] Third, Edwards's defines divine simplicity as "all that is in God is God," a definition that he essentially treats as a commonplace.[220] Fourth, Edwards identifies

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[217] "42. *Deut. 32:4*" in *WJEO* 42. Unless otherwise noted, these sermons are simply the transcribed notes from Edwards's sermons. I have edited them for readability, removing strikethroughs and adding appropriate punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

[218] Given that Muller includes the distinction between the volitional and the intellectual capacities of a human being under the heading of formal distinctions, Edwards appears to be linking the formal distinction to the substance-properties distinction. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:286.

[219] At the same time, it is worth noting that, at least at this stage in his life, Edwards is operating in the traditional categories of substance and accidents. He has not, as some scholars allege, abandoned notions of substance (including divine substance) in favor of a novel ontology. In fact, it is clear that he views categories of substance and categories of disposition as compatible.

[220] Variations of this definition appear in, among other places, Alaine of Lille, Leigh, and Willard. Commenting on the medieval debate as to whether attributes are merely distinct *ad extra* and in our human comprehension, or are in some measure distinct *ad intra* apart from consideration of a human knower, Muller writes, "Alain of Lille offered a solution that leaned strongly toward the former option: like the earlier tradition and echoing the Synod of Rheims, he argued that everything in God is God, allowing no essential distinction between the various divine attributes and affirming the utter simplicity of the divine being. The distinction of the attributes, therefore, is not in God himself but in the effects of God's work *ad extra*. Nonetheless, given that these attributes are evident to us by way of causality, they are not merely names or terms applied by us to God but are in fact proper designations of the divine substance." Muller, *PRRD*, 3:44.

According to Leigh, "God is most Simple, *Ens simplicissimum*. Simplicity is a property of God, whereby he is void of all composition, mixtion and division, being all Essence; whatsoever is in God, is God. Simpleness is the first property in God, which cannot in any sort agree to any creature." Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity Consisting of Ten Books* (London: A.M., 1654), 138, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A47625.0001.001.

Willard, in his *Complete Body of Divinity*, writes, "All the divine attributes are to be conceived in God in the abstract, as well as in the concrete. Thus we do not only say, God is wise, but God is wisdom: he is love, 1 John 4:5; light, 1 John 1:5. And the reason is, because whatsoever is in God, is God himself; which follows from his being void of any composition; and otherwise there were in him succession and division; something in him which is not absolutely first; and so something that is not himself, which were a contradiction." See Samuel Willard, "Sermon 16" in *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 8.2.2; see also "Sermon 20" and "Sermon 23."

distinct attributes such as justice and mercy with the same fundamental disposition in God. The difference between them, again, is in our way of conceiving, in what *we* call them. God's attributes are thus included in one another and identical to the divine disposition, which is identical to the divine essence.

In this passage, Edwards also makes a theological move that will be central in later discussions of his taxonomy of attributes. In the midst of relating attributes to each other in our manner of conceiving, he establishes a kind of hierarchy, in which certain attributes are included or nested in others. They are specific parts of a more general disposition. Thus, faithfulness is included in God's justice, but justice is a broader and more general attribute. Holiness is broader again than justice, and all of them are comprehended in God's general disposition to do those things that are pure, amiable, and right, a disposition which Edwards asserts is no different from God's own being and essence.[221]

In a sermon from the late 1720's on Daniel 4:35, Edwards asserts the same definition of divine simplicity in order to preserve God's aseity and independence.

> God's will could be determined by nothing outside of himself for this one reason: because if God's will were determined by anything outside himself, he would be, with respect to his will, a dependent being—dependent upon something else because it is determined by something else. Everything in God is God and therefore his will is himself and is his nature, and therefore if his will be dependent upon the creature, he himself is so too.[222]

"Everything in God is God," including his will. Thus, to make God's will dependent on something outside of him is to make God himself dependent on the creature. While this statement lacks the precision of a formal treatise (owing to the fact that it is only sermon notes), the assertion of Edwards's summary statement of simplicity along with concerns about God's

[221] See *WJE* 8:422.
[222] "68. *Dan. 4:35*" in *WJEO* 43.

independence and aseity witness to the fact that Edwards is operating within the classical tradition of divine simplicity.

In a number of sermons scattered throughout his corpus, Edwards employs a pure act account of the divine nature, which, as Steven Duby demonstrates, is an important component of divine simplicity.[223] In particular, asserting that God is pure act is a way of denying that he is composed of act and potency. In lacking all potency, God is fully active and acting, full of life and fecundity. In an early sermon on God's omnipresence from Psalm 139:7-10, Edwards demonstrates divine immensity and omnipotence by appealing to God's simplicity and non-compositeness.

> We must take heed that we haven't so gross a notion of God's immensity and omnipotence. We must not conceive of it as if part of God were in one place and part in another as great bodies are. For God is not made up of parts, for he is a simple, pure act. If we say that God is in this house, it must not be understood that part of God is in this house but God is here. 'Tis not part of God who is in us, but God is in us.[224]

In a later sermon on Ezekiel 8:8, Edwards asks, "In what sense is pity ascribed to God?" He notes that "pity must not be ascribed to God as it is to men as a passionate motion of the soul."[225] Men are moved to pity by the suffering of others. But God cannot be so moved, first because such motion is "inconsistent with immutability, since all passions denote mutability," and second, because "it is inconsistent with God's being a pure act." When men feel pity, they are under the force of something within themselves. These forces are called passions, "because the soul is passive in them." "But God is pure act, i.e. He is nothing but mere act without any passiveness." Indeed, he cannot be passive, because passivity is inconsistent with his independence. Again, Edwards, like the tradition of classical theism, links the doctrines of

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[223] Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, vol. 30 of *T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 81.

[224] "44. *Ps. 139:7-10*" in *WJEO* 42.

[225] "477. *Ezek. 8:8*" in *WJEO* 53.

immutability, simplicity (in the form of *actus purus*), and God's aseity and independence. This cluster of doctrines stands or falls together.

In a sermon on Romans 8:29-30 from 1739, Edwards argues that God's love for the saints has been exercised from eternity to eternity, because "the Acting of Love and the being of Love are the same in God." This contrasts with men, for whom "the Habit or principle differs from the act." But God is not like this. "There is no distinction between act & habit in him. Love in him is a pure act, so that the Eternal being of Love & the Eternal Exercise of Love are the same. For indeed God's own being & Essence is a pure act."[226]

2.3 Late Evidence: Letters, Treatises, and Miscellanies

Thus, Edwards's early ministry contains straightforward and unremarkable affirmations of divine simplicity in a variety of sermons. Those who argue that Edwards minimizes simplicity might argue that his thought developed over time, that his early affirmations are simply parroting the tradition, whereas his mature thought moves away from the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity. However, three lines of argument demonstrate that Edwards maintained a settled (and unremarkable) conviction that God is a simple, non-composite pure act throughout his life.[227]

The first line of argument is found in a letter to John Erskine in 1750 following his dismissal from the pastorate at Northampton. Erskine had offered Edwards his help in securing a pastorate in Scotland, provided that Edwards could affirm the Westminster Confession of Faith and submit to the Presbyterian form of church government. Edwards responds by noting that "there would be no difficulty" in his subscribing to the Confession.[228] While this comment is

[226] "528. Rom. 8:29–30" in *WJEO* 54. I have slightly amended the text as it appears on the Yale site. The website uses the phrase "sure act" twice. But as this is a strange phrase, it seems likely that Edwards wrote "pure act," given the theological principle that he describes.

[227] So Oliver Crisp, "On the Orthodoxy of Jonathan Edwards," *SJT* 67.3 (2014): 310.

[228] "Letter 117. To the Reverend John Erskine, July 5, 1750" in *WJE* 16:355.

made in passing and centers primarily on questions of ecclesiology, it is noteworthy that the Westminster Confession contains an affirmation of divine simplicity when it declares that the one living and true God is "without body, parts, or passions." Thus, any move to minimize simplicity on Edwards's part must be regarded as unintentional, a notion that is highly unlikely given Edwards's intelligence, education, and attentiveness to the precisions of theology.[229]

The second line of argument is more substantial and comes from a key section in Edwards's treatise *Freedom of the Will*. While the bulk of this work focuses on the question of human freedom and moral agency, Part 4, Section 7 is devoted to "The Necessity of the Divine Will." Before examining this important question, Edwards sets forth a few observations on the challenges of speaking precisely about God. He notes that "Language is indeed very deficient, in regard of terms to express precise truth concerning our own minds, and their faculties and operations."[230] Words, Edwards argues, "were first formed to express external things," and then borrowed and applied to internal and spiritual things "in a sort of figurative sense." Thus, there is an unavoidable ambiguity in speaking about the human soul, owing to the inadequacy of words to precisely signify spiritual things. This difficulty is compounded when we speak of "the mind of the incomprehensible Deity." The human mind, at least, is "infinitely more within our view, and nearer to a proportion of the measure of our comprehension, and more commensurate to the use and import of human speech." But if we have difficulty in speaking of the human mind with human language, how much more will we find it "difficult to express or conceive things

[229] See Stephen R. Holmes, Oliver Crisp, and Paul Helm, "Does Jonathan Edwards Use a Dispensational Ontology? A Response to Sang Hyun Lee," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2004), 99–114.

[230] *WJE* 1:376.

according to exact metaphysical truth, relating to the nature and manner of the existence of things in the divine understanding and will"?[231]

Edwards recognizes and appreciates the great progress in metaphysics that philosophers and theologians have made over time. Nevertheless, there "is still work enough left for future inquiries and researches, and room for progress still to be made" with respect to metaphysical examinations of the nature of our own souls. But, Edwards says, "we had need to be infinitely able metaphysicians, to conceive with clearness, according to strict, proper and perfect truth, concerning the nature of the divine essence, and the modes of the action and operation of the powers of the divine mind." And what creature can ever hope to be an infinitely able metaphysician? Thus, as we saw earlier with Turretin and Ames, Edwards recognizes the inadequacy of human language to precisely comprehend God. This conviction about language is rooted in a conviction about the distance between the divine being and creaturely being, summarized in the Latin phrase *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), or its medieval equivalent, *finiti ad infinitum dari proportio non potest*[232] (no proportion can be made between the finite and the infinite). Edwards himself echoes this latter phrase in his notes on the Mind when he writes, "there is no proportion between finite being, however great, and universal being."[233]

Having made his general comments about the inadequacy of human language to precisely express divine reality, Edwards singles out one area in particular in which we must recognize the inadequate, accommodated nature of our speech about God. He notes that we are obliged to

[231] *WJE* 1:376.
[232] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:200.
[233] *WJE* 6:381. Edwards also makes use of this common-place in *Religious Affections*: "for finite bears no proportion at all to that which is infinite" (*WJE* 2:327), as well as in a sermon on Romans 1:20: "for there is no proportion at all between a finite & an Infinite." "706. Rom. 1:20" in *WJEO* 61.

conceive of some things in God "as consequent and dependent on others, and of some things pertaining to the divine nature and will as the foundation of others."[234] As examples, he notes the priority of God's knowledge and holiness to his happiness in the order of nature, as well as the perfection of his understanding as the foundation of his wise purposes, and the holiness of his nature as the cause of his holy acts. As finite creatures, we can't help but conceive of God in these ways. But it is crucial that we remember that these are only our ways of conceiving. For "when we speak of cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, fundamental and dependent, determining and determined, in the first Being, who is self-existent, independent, of perfect and absolute simplicity and immutability, and the first cause of all things; doubtless there must be less propriety in such representations, than when we speak of derived dependent beings, who are compounded, and liable to perpetual mutation and succession."[235] Speaking of cause and effect, antecedent and consequent in relation to God is improper. We are representing God's self-existent and independent being in modes of speech that are proper to dependent and derived beings. And significantly for our present purposes, Edwards affirms and accents God's perfect and absolute simplicity as of a piece with his independence, distinguishing him from his compounded (composite), mutable, and temporal creatures. Again, given the current debates about Edwards and simplicity, this confession is remarkable because it is so unremarkable. Edwards simply takes it as a matter of course that God is independent and absolutely simple and non-composite, and he does so in one of his final major works.[236]

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[234] *WJE* 1:376.

[235] *WJE* 1:375–377.

[236] So Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116. "The passing references to simplicity…are consistent with the work of a thinker who does not find the doctrine in question a subject worthy of great comment because, at the time Edwards was writing, it was uncontroversial."

The final line of argument for Edwards's persistent, lifelong affirmation of divine simplicity is drawn from his extensive notes on world religions found in his late miscellanies. These notes, drawn from the writings of others and focusing on the content of non-Christian religions, were a key component in Edwards's late wrestlings with the deistic challenge to the particularity of the Christian religion. Put simply, seventeenth and eighteenth century deists like John Toland and Matthew Tindal accented "the scandal of particularity," the Christian belief that apart from God's revelation in Christ, there is no salvation for humanity. This belief left five-sixths of the world's population in the eighteenth century damned and without hope. Thus, the deists challenged God's fairness in his treatment of non-Christians.[237]

In response to this challenge, Edwards read many works devoted to the subject of the knowledge of God among the heathen. He copied extensively from books by Theophilus Gale, Ralph Cudworth, and Chevalier Ramsay. Theophilus Gale's four volume *The Court of the Gentiles* was devoted to demonstrating that all ancient languages and philosophy were derived from the Jews. Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* sought to demonstrate that the wiser and more philosophical pagans like Socrates, Plato, Parmenides, and so forth were trinitarian monotheists.[238] Ramsay's *Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* along with his *Travels of Cyrus* aimed to prove that the best of ancient wisdom conformed to biblical religion. All three of these authors propounded some version of *prisca theologia,* or ancient theology*,* the belief that "vestiges of true religion were taught by the Greeks and other non-Christian

[237] See Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 580–598; see also Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[238] Cudworth claimed to prove that "Gentiles and Pagans, however Polytheists and idolaters, were not unacquainted with knowledge of the true God." Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Richard Royston, 1678), 623, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A35345.0001.001; quoted in McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 22.

traditions."[239] Often, proponents of the *prisca theologia* claimed that true revelation from God to the antediluvians such as Noah (monotheism, the Trinity, creation from nothing) was disseminated by Noah's sons after the flood and then passed down (and often corrupted) by the great philosophers and religious teachers such as Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, and Plato. Often this original deposit was reinvigorated by encounters with the Jews throughout history. Edwards enthusiastically embraced the tradition of *prisca theologia*, and planned to deploy it against the deistic challenge to God's fairness. To that end, in his later miscellanies he copied thousands of words from Gale, Cudworth, and Ramsay.

The relevance of these extended quotations for our present purposes lies in the fact that Edwards copied quotations purporting to show that the ancient heathen held to traditional Christian beliefs about God, the Trinity, and the immortality of the soul, among other doctrines.[240] That we are meant to see Edwards's recording of these quotations as endorsements of their content is confirmed by his own marginalia. For example, next to Miscellany 1355, which contains extended excerpts from Ramsay's *Philosophical Principles of Religion*, Edwards repeatedly rights "Right Notions of God," "Right Notions of Religion," or "Right Notions of God and Religion."[241] Edwards's excerpts from Cudworth are entitled things like "Extracts from Dr. Cudworth Concerning the Opinions and Traditions of Heathen Philosophers Agreeable to

[239] McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 581.

[240] "Edwards overlooked Ramsay's unorthodox denunciations of predestination, original sin, the satisfaction theory of the atonement and God's infinite foreknowledge, and his arguments for purgatory, metempsychosis, and universal pardon." McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 213–14. Peter Thuesen, in his introduction to Edwards's *Catalogue of Books* writes, "Similarly, Edwards disregarded the Anglicanism and Latitudinarianism of the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, whose *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) accounts for 9 percent of the material in the Stockbridge "Miscellanies." Peter J. Thuesen, "Editors' Introduction" in *WJE* 26:48.

[241] *WJE* 23:543n9. Edwards echoes this sort of judgment in his public works, as when he writes that Seneca, "that great philosopher" and Paul's contemporary, "held one Supreme Being, and had in many respects right notions of the divine perfections and providence." *WJE* 12:300.

Truth Concerning Matters of Religion."[242] Thus, Edwards took it for granted that Cudworth, Ramsay, and Gale were accurately summarizing and/or quoting the ancient heathen, and that the heathen had significant agreement with the Christian doctrine of God. Therefore, Edwards's quotations from Cudworth, et. al. can act as a mirror for his own theology; in copying these quotations from Anaxagoras, Aristotle, Parmenides, and Plato, we can see Edwards's own convictions about the being and nature of God. Or again, to make the form of argument clear: 1) Edwards copies quotations from ancient non-Christian philosophers as quoted in the works of Cudworth, Ramsay, and Gale. 2) Edwards writes that these heathen philosophers held to "right notions" about God and religion and that their opinions are "agreeable to truth." 3) Therefore, we can draw conclusions about Edwards's own theological beliefs from the quotations that he copied.

With that methodology in mind, the quotations from non-Christian philosophers on divine simplicity are striking. For example, he copies Ramsay thusly, "Simplicius has preserved to us some verses of Parmenides which explain fully his sense: 'The supreme Deity,' says he, 'is one, singular, solitary and most simple Being, unmade, self-originated and necessarily existent, whose duration is immutable, remaining always in himself without flux or succession.'"[243] Again, he quotes Ramsay on Anaxagoras, who believed that "a pure uncompounded spirit presides over the universe." He further affirmed that this spirit or soul that animated the universe was "most simple, and most pure, and the most exempt from all mixture and composition."[244] Ramsay summarizes Aristotle's understanding of God in this way: "The eternal and living being, the most noble of all beings, a substance entirely distinct from matter, without extension, without division,

[242] *WJE* 23:640.
[243] *WJE* 23:547.
[244] *WJE* 23:466.

without parts, and without succession; who understands everything by one single act, and continuing himself immovable, gives motion to all things, and enjoys in himself a perfect happiness, as knowing and contemplating himself with infinite pleasure."[245]

Edwards's quotations from Cudworth show the same commitment to God's simplicity and indivisibility. "Melissus declared that his one *Ens* must needs be devoid of body, because if it had any had any crassities in it, it must have parts."[246] Likewise Xenophanes and Plato place the Deity "above motion and rest and all those antitheses of inferiour beings."[247] Cudworth also quotes the same citation of Parmenides in Simplicius as found in Ramsay. With respect to Aristotle, Edwards copies sections in which Aristotle affirms that God's intellect is identical with the intelligibles, that God's essence is the same as his act or energy, and that God is "devoid of parts, and indivisible."[248]

However, the most important evidence for Edwards's affirmation of simplicity comes from his conclusion to his quotations from Cudworth. Having cited the traditions of the heathen which are "agreeable to truth," Edwards concludes with the following robust affirmation of classical theism.

> From these things are collected this notion of the nature and attributes of God, viz. that he is the first being; from eternity; unmade; incorruptible; infinite; incomprehensible; self-existent; necessary existing; self-sufficient; invisible; dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see; a spirit or mind altogether incorporeal; a pure act whose essence is energy; without all extension [or] bulk; indivisible; unmultipliable; one most simple; everywhere present yet not properly in place; perfectly immutable. [God's] whole external duration is a permanent, unsuccessive duration without past, present, and future, or any successive flux, pervading and diffused through all things, without local motion or rest. [God is] intelligent; infinitely wise; yea, infinite intellect and wisdom itself; an omnipotent being who can do everything that don't involve a contradiction; that being who only truly has being.[249]

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[245] *WJE* 23:468–469.
[246] *WJE* 23:650.
[247] *WJE* 23:650.
[248] *WJE* 23:650, 653.
[249] *WJE* 23:657–658.

If there is any doubt that Edwards embraced the medieval and Reformed orthodox consensus on the doctrine of God, this quotation ought to put it to rest.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, from the beginning of his ministry until its end, in his sermons, personal letters, public treatises, and private notebooks, Edwards repeatedly and clearly affirms and commends the doctrine of divine simplicity, as it was preserved in the broad Reformed tradition which he self-consciously placed himself within. Edwards accepts as givens the truths that everything that is in God is God, that God is simple, pure act, and that God is indivisible and devoid of parts. Nowhere does he express any reticence about the doctrine of divine simplicity or offer any evidence that affirming simplicity is in tension with other aspects of his theology.[250]

In light of this background, we turn now to examine the main evidence used to argue for Edwards's deviation from the divine simplicity tradition. In doing so, I hope to show that, far from minimizing or denying divine simplicity, the relevant quotations in the *Discourse on the Trinity* forthrightly affirm divine simplicity. What's more, I hope to show that simplicity is not a marginal component of Edwards's theology proper but is instead *essential* to his articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

[250] So Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 93.

CHAPTER 3 BACKGROUND TO EDWARDS'S TRINITARIANISM

3.1 Introduction

In the next chapter, I will offer a detailed exposition of Edwards's *Discourse on the Trinity.* Doing so requires understanding Edwards's argument in light of his historical and theological context. To that end, the aim of this chapter is to situate Edwards's understanding of the Trinity in light of his sources, his polemical context, and the use of the psychological analogy of the Trinity among the Puritan and Reformed orthodox.

3.2 Edwards's Sources

We begin with a word on Edwards's sources. Properly interpreting Edwards's doctrine of God depends upon locating Edwards's claims and argumentation in relation to other thinkers to whom he had access. Reconstructing Edwards's sources is no easy task, but it is aided significantly by the existence of his "Catalogue of Books" (a record of his book interests, especially those that he wished to acquire) and his "Account Book" (a record of books that he lent to others). Additionally, we have references in Edwards's corpus to a number of works which can aid us in divining the roots of Edwards's trinitarian thinking.

Peter Thuesen, the editor of the Yale volume containing the Catalogue and Account books, has compellingly argued that Edwards was an active participant in the transatlantic republic of letters.[251] His thought was profoundly shaped and informed by his engagement with European and American works of theology, philosophy, geography, history, science, logic,

[251] Peter J. Thuesen, "Jonathan Edwards and the Transatlantic World of Books," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 3.1 (2013): 43–54.

mathematics, and literature. Thuesen offers five theses about Edwards's world of books, the first two of which are most relevant for our purposes.

> (1) Edwards' native theological language was the scholasticism of post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy. (2) Edwards' entire career was defined by the tension between Reformed orthodoxy and Enlightenment latitude.[252]

When it comes to the scholasticism of the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox, we know that Edwards was familiar with William Ames's *Medulla Theologia*, Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Peter van Mastricht's *Theoretico-practica Theologia*.[253] In addition, we know that in his sermons, treatises, and notebooks Edwards cites and references a number of other works of Reformed orthodoxy: Thomas Ridgley's *Body of Divinity*, Thomas Stackhouse's *Complete Body of Divinity,* William Twisse's *Dissertatio De Scientia Media*, Samuel Willard's *Complete Body of Divinity*, as well as numerous works by John Owen and Stephen Charnock. Additionally, it is likely that Edwards read the Anglican John Edwards's *Theologia Reformata*; he lists it a number of times in his Catalogue and quotes from other works by the Anglican Edwards.[254] Thus, while we don't know all that Edwards read (he certainly read more works of divinity than the titles listed here), this list provides a circumscribed baseline from

[252] Thuesen, "Jonathan Edwards and the Transatlantic World of Books," 43–54. The other three theses are as follows: (3) Edwards was an eager participant in two transatlantic republics of letters—one secular, one evangelical. (4) Edwards' worldview was deeply colored by European politics. (5) We have more to learn about Edwards and his books.

[253] *WJE* 21:3. "Edwards was well-versed in the Western church's teachings on the Trinity through the writings of Reformed scholastics such as Francis Turretin and Peter van Mastricht and Puritan writers like William Ames." Layne Hancock recently "discovered" Edwards's copy of the Latin text of Ames's *Medulla*, with Edwards's signature in the flyleaf dated 1721. See C. Layne Hancock, "Edwards' Copy of William Ames' Medulla," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 7.1 (2017): 55–61. Edwards likely encountered this work during his studies at Yale. Edwards's letters abound with recommendations and references to Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. And, of course, there is the well-known comment that Edwards makes in a 1747 letter to Joseph Bellamy "[T]ake Mastricht for divinity in general, doctrine, practice, and controversy; or as an universal system of divinity; and it is much better than Turretin or any other book in the world, excepting the Bible in my opinion." *WJE* 16:217.

[254] This list is drawn from Appendix D of *WJE* 26, as well as the list of references in "The Blank Bible." See *WJE* 24:111. The reference to Twisse comes from the marginalia of Edwards's copy of Ames's *Medulla*, as cited by Hancock.

which to evaluate and interpret Edwards's doctrine of God. These sources allow us to situate Edwards's argumentation within the larger Reformed world to which he belonged.[255]

Additionally, beyond the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy, Edwards showed a keen interest in the work of Andrew Michael Ramsay. Chevalier Ramsay, as he was known in France, was a Roman Catholic convert and staunch anti-Calvinist.[256] Edwards excerpted numerous passages from Ramsay in his Miscellanies, beginning in 1751. Many of these concerned the right notions of God and religion found among the heathen religions and philosophies, a subject that much interested Edwards in his later years. However, Edwards also excerpted a number of passages from Ramsay in which Ramsay presents his own rational arguments for the Trinity. Thus, while Edwards wrote most of his *Discourse on the Trinity* prior to encountering Ramsay, it seems likely that he nevertheless recognized similarities in his own formulations and the Catholic theologian's.

Finally, as Kyle Strobel has argued, Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity, as it is articulated in his *Discourse*, must be understood in the light of his polemical context.[257] Anti-trinitarian sentiment was in vogue in Edwards's day, ranging from deism to Socinianism to the subordinationism of Samuel Clarke. Clarke's writings in particular provide an exemplary foil for understanding Edwards's argumentation for the Trinity, both in his Miscellanies and his *Discourse*. Clarke, the Anglican rector of St. James in Westminster, came to prominence when he gave the prestigious Boyle lectures in 1704-1705. Edwards was familiar with these lectures in

[255] In addition to the sources that we know Edwards is familiar with, I will also employ the work of Edward Leigh and Bartholomew Keckermann. Plantinga Pauw notes that Edwards used Keckermann's logic text at Yale, and may have read his theological works. See Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 46.

[256] For background on Ramsay, see *WJE* 23:13.

[257] Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 28–34. The most comprehensive study of Clarke's Trinitarian theology is that of Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729)*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 75 (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

their published form under the title *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. Clarke became a controversial figure in 1712 with the publication of *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*.[258] The book, along with similar publications by William Whiston, set off a firestorm of controversy, prompting responses from the Anglican John Edwards, James Knight, Thomas Bennet, and Daniel Waterland.[259] Edwards was fully acquainted with the controversy, listing a number of the books involved in his "Catalogue" and citing a number of them in his Miscellanies.[260] Thuesen writes, "Evidence of the controversy is abundant in the "Catalogue," which proves that Edwards had read Clarke's book (he cites an advertisement from it in no 537)."[261]

[258] Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity and Related Writings*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Samuel Clarke* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1738).

[259] Muller writes, "Quite literally, the rise of a scholarly Arianism in the English church at the beginning of the eighteenth century can be traced, formally, to three substantial essays: William Whiston's *Primitive Christianity Revised* (1711–12), his *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery* (1712), and Samuel Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712)." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:129. Regarding the Trinitarian controversies of the early eighteenth century, Minkema notes, "An important stage of the controversy ensued in England when Samuel Clarke, a prominent Anglican theologian, published *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* in 1712. In this seminal work, Clarke renounced the Athanasian Creed's formulation of three co-equal and co-eternal persons as unscriptural and treated the Trinitarian question as non-essential to the faith. Clarke's book, indicative of the changing tide of opinion, elicited a mountain of print, with discussion centering on the persons of the Son and Holy Ghost. One of the most prolific of his opponents, Calvinist clergyman John Edwards, lamented that some of the most impressive minds in England were taking up the heretical causes. 'But now,' he wrote, 'our Elephants are turn'd against ourselves. Some of our own Body are gone over to the Enemy, and thereby the state of the Religious War is wretchedly alter'd.' Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1712), pp. 289, 304, and John Edwards, *Some Animadversions on Dr. Clarke's Scripture-Doctrine (As he Stiles it) of the Trinity* (London, 1712), p. 3." *WJE* 14:43.

[260] In his introduction to Edwards's sermons from 1723-129, Minkema writes, "Edwards himself was fully acquainted with the efforts in England and New England to refute anti-trinitarianism. His "Catalogue of Reading" lists several of the important works to come out of the debate...These include, in the order in which they appear in the "Catalogue," James Knight, *Eight Sermons Preached … in defence of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit* (London, 1721); George Bull, *Some Important Points of Primitive Christianity maintained and defended; in several sermons and other discourses … To which is prefixed, the history of his life … by Robert Nelson* (4 vols. London, 1713); William Whiston, A *New theory of the Earth* (London, 1696); and Thomas Finch, *The Answer of the Earl of Nottingham to Mr. Whiston's letter to him, concerning the eternity of the Son of God* (London, 1721)." See *WJE* 14:44.

[261] *WJE* 26:74. Thuesen also notes entries for the confutations of Clarke by James Knight (no. 104) and Daniel Waterland (no. 674), as well as a defense of Clarke by John Jackson (no. 518).

3.3 Edwards's Polemical Context

In light of Edwards's sources, we may now examine Edwards's polemical context, especially the anti-trinitarianism of Samuel Clarke as expressed in his *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*.[262] Muller describes Clarke as a rational supernaturalist, one who "gathered textual evidence [for his position], but rested primarily on reason."[263] Methodologically, Clarke's book lists over 1200 biblical texts that are relevant for the doctrine of the Trinity, often with brief exegetical comments. He then offers 55 theses concerning the Trinity, which are then defended by cross-references to the earlier biblical texts as well as quotations from the early church fathers.[264] Significantly, Clarke eschewed the abstruse metaphysical speculation characteristic of the schoolmen (both medieval and Reformed), instead insisting that "all reasonings therefore, (beyond what is strictly demonstrable by the most evident and undeniable light of Nature,) deduced from their supposed metaphysical Nature, Essence, or Substance; instead of their Personal Characters, Offices, Powers and Attributes delivered in the Scriptures; are uncertain and at best but probable hypotheses."[265] Clarke approvingly quotes a "Dr. Payne" to the effect that the schoolmen "ran into a labyrinth of subtleties and difficulties, about One's being Three, and Three One."[266] The introduction of concepts like substantial modes, subsistent relations, unsubsistent existences, concrete personal properties, and the like "wove an artificial cloudy network of thin but dark cobwebs" around the plain notion of one God, the Father, with an only-

[262] For the importance of Clarke to understanding Edwards, see Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*, The Jonathan Edward Classic Studies Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 87–93.

[263] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:130. Muller goes on to note that Clarke is "representative of the theological tendencies of the time and of the effect of rationalist philosophy upon doctrinal formulation."

[264] Clarke quoted the fathers, not to commend their own doctrines directly (since many of them differed from him), but rather "to show what important Concessions they were obliged to make," concessions which necessarily inferred Clarke's conclusions. See "Letter to Robert Nelson," in Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 253.

[265] Quotations from *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* itself will be taken from the 1738 edition and identified by proposition and page number: Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 4, 123.

[266] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 39, 178.

begotten Son and a divine Spirit. With these words, Payne (and Clarke) dismiss the entire grammar of Trinitarian theology as it developed among the medieval and Reformed scholastics.

While in his own day Clarke was accused of Arianism, substantively his theology is actually a more moderate form of subordinationism, similar to that of Eusebius of Caesarea and Basil of Ancyra.[267] Fundamental to Clarke's thought is his definition of a person. Put simply, a person is an "intelligent agent," in other words, a being possessing understanding (intelligence) and will (agency).[268] The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each persons, or intelligent agents, but "There is One Supreme Cause and Original of Things; One simple, uncompounded, undivided, intelligent Agent, or Person; who is the Alone Author of all Being, and the Fountain of all Power," namely the Father alone.[269] The three intelligent agents exist "with" each other from the beginning, but the Son and Spirit are subordinate to the Father, since he alone is "Self-existent, Underived, Unoriginated, Independent."[270] These qualities are personal and incommunicable attributes of the Father, rendering him the one and only supreme and proper God.[271] The Son and Spirit, while coeternal with the Father, are not coequal with him, since he is their cause; they are

[267] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:131. On Clarke's affinities to these thinkers, see Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729)*, 89–141, 217–20.

[268] "Intelligent Agent, is the proper and adequate Definition of the Word, Person; nor can it otherwise be understood with any distinct Sense or Meaning at all." Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 1, 122.

[269] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 1, 122. Clarke's strong affirmation of divine simplicity makes the following claim by Muller puzzling: "[Clarke] also denied the idea of one indivisible divine substance or essence: the essence was divisible and the three persons all partook of it, the Son and Spirit being derived from the Father and therefore subordinate to him." See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:131. Given that, for Clarke, person and essence language always belong together, the supreme, simple, uncompounded, undivided Person is also a supreme, simple, uncompounded, undivided essence. The Father is the true and proper cause of the Son and Spirit's life and being, but the Father's supremacy, independence, and therefore simplicity and indivisibility, are strictly incommunicable.

[270] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 5, 123. See Prop. 2, 122: "With This First and Supreme Cause or Father of all Things, there has existed from the Beginning, a Second divine Person, which is his Word or Son." See also Prop. 3, 122: "With the Father and the Son, there has existed from the Beginning, a Third divine Person, which is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son." See also Prop. 7, 123. "The Father Alone, is, in the highest, strict, proper, and absolute Sense, Supreme over All."

[271] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 9, 124. "The Scripture, when it mentions the One God, or the Only God, always means the Supreme Person of the Father." The Son has "all Communicable divine Powers," meaning all powers excluding independence and supreme authority. Self-existence, independence, and supreme authority are strictly incommunicable. See Prop. 27, 151–153.

begotten and proceed (respectively), not by a necessity of nature, but by the Father's incomprehensible power and will.[272] As a result, the Son and Spirit, while eternal, are not necessary as the Father is, since they lack the distinguishing attributes of self-existence, independence, and supreme authority.[273]

Clarke denies that the Son or *Logos* of the Father is the "internal Reason or Wisdom of God," since reason and wisdom are mere attributes and the Son is clearly a "real Person." He is called the Word because he is the "Revealer of the Will, of the Father to the World."[274] To claim that the Son is the internal Reason or Wisdom of the Father and at the same time a real distinct person or intelligent agent is "wholly unintelligible."[275] In his notes on John 1:1, Clarke claims that the Word was "with God," not "In God, as Reason or understanding is In the Mind; but, *pros*

[272] "The Son is not Self-existent; but derives his Being, and All his Attributes, from the Father, as from the Supreme Cause." Clarke rejects metaphysical speculation on the precise nature of the Son's derivation (see Prop 13), but does hold that generation means that the Father is the "True and Proper Cause" of the Son. Generation, or begetting, "when applied to God, is but a figurative Word, signifying only in general, immediate Derivation of Being and Life from God himself." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 13, 138. The precise nature of this begetting is incomprehensible and unanalyzable by men.

On the issue of coeternality, Clarke is ambiguous. On the one hand, Clarke is clearly no Arian; he insists that the Son existed before all worlds, and that it is presumptuous to affirm "that there was a time when the Son was not." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 15-16, 141. However, a rejection of the Arian affirmation is not the same as an affirmation of the coeternality of the Son and Spirit. Nevertheless, in a letter to the bishops in the midst of the controversy, Clarke forthrightly affirms the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. "My Opinion is, That the Son of God was eternally begotten by the eternal incomprehensible Power and Will of the Father; and that the Holy Spirit was likewise eternally derived from the Father, by or through the Son, according to the eternal incomprehensible Power and Will of the Father." See "A Paper laid by Dr. Clarke before the Bishops," in Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 553. Thus, Clarke does not deny the co-eternity of the Son and Spirit, but only their coequality.

[273] "The Son (according to the Reasoning of the Primitive Writers) derives his Being from the Father, (whatever the particular Manner of That Derivation be,) not by mere Necessity of Nature, (which would be in reality Self-existence, not Filiation;) But by an Act of the Father's incomprehensible Power and Will." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 7, 141. Clarke draws a sharp line between necessity and act of the will. If the Son is begotten by necessity of nature, then it is not the Father who begets at all, but some other force acting necessarily. Clarke applies this same line of reasoning to the Holy Spirit in Props. 19–22.

[274] "The Logos, the Word or Son of the Father, sent into the World to assume our Flesh, to become Man, and die for the Sins of Mankind; was not the internal Reason or Wisdom of God, an Attribute or Power of the Father; but a real Person, the same who from the Beginning had been the Word, or Revealer of the Will, of the Father to the World." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, Prop. 7, 141.

[275] He quotes Eusebius approvingly that the Son is neither the inward Word of the Father (i.e. a mere attribute), nor is he the same person with the Father, but is instead a "real distinct living Subsistence." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 147.

ton theon, with God, as one Person is present With another."[276] He was with the Father (1 John 1:2) and had glory with God before the world was (John 17:5). In doing so, Clarke rejects two alternative interpretations of the verse. The first is the Nicene, in which the *Logos* is "Another Self-existent, Underived, Independent Person, co-ordinate in essential supreme Authority and Dominion with the Father Almighty." This, Clarke avers, is necessarily real polytheism, "whatever Metaphysical Union may be imagined of Two such co-ordinate Persons."[277] The second interpretation understands *Logos* to refer to the divine Reason, which Clarke argues diminishes the incarnation by suggesting that the *Logos* becoming flesh is "a mere empty figure of speech" signifying that Christ possessed the wisdom of the Father in a more perfect and continued manner than the other prophets.[278] This is Clarke's persistent criticism of Nicene trinitarianism. In seeking to avoid the error of Arianism by affirming the self-existence of the Son and Holy Spirit along with the Father, Nicene orthodoxy effectively denies the existence of the Son and Spirit, reducing them to mere modes, powers, or names of the one God, and thus falling into the modalistic error of the Sabellians and Socinians. On the other hand, if those who hold to Nicene orthodoxy insist on three distinct, self-existent, co-eternal, and co-equal persons, then they are tri-theists. The true *tertium quid*, according to Clarke, is subordinationist Trinitarianism, which he claims has strong precedent among the ante-Nicene fathers.[279]

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[276] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 44.

[277] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 44.

[278] See Clarke's "Commentary on 40 Texts in response to Dr. Nelson," no. 20, in Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 294.

[279] In response to Gastrell, who accused Clarke of positing three divine beings and thus falling into a kind of paganism, even if he insisted on a subordination of two of the divine beings to the other. Clarke responds by noting that three divine beings does not demand three Gods, since in Clarke's mind, Scripture and the creeds define "God" as the Almighty Father. Nevertheless, we may say that there are three divine beings, because Scripture and the creeds present to us "three distinct Agents." However, only one of these agents is properly called "God the Father Almighty." The real danger of tritheism comes from those who posit "Three perfectly co-ordinate, and equally Supreme Persons or Agents, (whatever Distinctions, or whatever Unity of Nature be supposed between them)." On the other hand, if the Father, Son, and Spirit are conceived as "One Individual Being," then we have fallen into some form of modalism, since the Son and Spirit are mere modes or different names of "That One

Fundamental to Clarke's view is the rejection of metaphysical speculation about substance and subsistences, together with a persistent linkage between person and essence or being. A distinct person is a distinct being and possesses a distinct essence, and no amount of scholastic parsing can make it otherwise.[280] Thus, one form of orthodox response was to challenge Clarke precisely at this point by reasserting and explaining the classical trinitarian grammar of person, subsistence, substance, hypostasis, and the like. However, the different definitions adopted by Clarke and the orthodox resulted in much confusion. When Waterland claimed that the controversy was over the consubstantiality of the Son and Spirit, Clarke protested that Waterland had no idea what he was talking about.[281]

According to Muller, the controversy revealed "the increasing difficulty of maintaining traditional trinitarian person-language in the early modern era."[282] Clarke's definition of person, while perhaps comprehensible to the average person in the eighteenth century, differed from the

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Supreme, that One Simple and Uncompounded Being, which is the Father of All." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 329.

[280] Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 266."The Schoolmen have indeed, in their barbarous language, made Hypostasis to signify Person; but what they mean by the Word, they themselves know not." Clarke refuses to allow a distinction of Being and Person, insisting always that if the Bible teaches that there is only one being who can be called the Supreme God, it necessarily teaches that there is only one person who can be called the Supreme God.

[281] Here is Clarke's summary of the central issue, taken from the postscript to his response to one of his opponents. "The wisest Gentiles were by Nature, and the Jews by the Law, taught to believe in One God. By which, both of them always meant One Supreme Person or Intelligent Agent, the Maker and Governor of all Things. Our Savior and his Apostles taught, that Jesus Christ was the Son of that One God, whom both Jews and Gentiles already acknowledged. When therefore Christ was himself also moreover stiled [sic} God; In what Sense was this probably understood, by those among whom he was first so stiled? Would they not naturally undress it in the Subordinate Sense; in which Sense, both *elohim* and *theos* are very frequently used in Scripture and in all other Writings? Or could they understand it to signify, that he was individually the same God with Him whose Son he is? When even they who most earnestly affirm him to be the same God, do not indeed mean that he is (in that literal and proper Sense) the same God [the same Supreme Person or agent;] but only that he is of the same individual Substance; which is neither agreeable to the Council of Nice, (who taught him to be *homoousios*, not *monoousios toi patri*,) nor proved from Scripture. And, if it was; yet being of the same individual Substance, (if thereby was not meant being the same Supreme Person,) would not amount to being individually the same God; but either another God [or Supreme Person] in the same individual Substance, if his Personality and distinct Life is by Necessity of Nature: or else, if his Personality and distinct Life was derived to him by the Will of the Father, though in the same individual Substance; then He [his Person] is as really subordinate to and dependent on the Father, as if it were not in the same individual Substance. For the Notion of God, absolutely Speaking, includes that his Life, as well as his Substance, is underived." See "Postscript of Letter to the Author" in Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, 448. For Clarke's orthodox critics, the chief confusion is in the use of terms like "individual substance."

[282] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:133.

traditional definitions offered by orthodox divines. Boethius had defined a person as "an individual substance of a rational nature." Confusion over the referent of "substance" eventually led other divines to try alternative definitions, such as the one put forward by Richard of St. Victor: "a divine person is an incommunicable existence of a divine nature."[283] Variations and combinations of these definitions multiplied in the medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation eras.[284] By the time of the trinitarian controversies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even those attempting to defend the traditional orthodox doctrine were resorting to modern understandings of person.[285]

3.4 The Psychological Analogy for the Trinity among the Reformed Orthodox

We turn now to the psychological analogy itself. Dating back to Augustine, psychological analogies posit some likeness between the soul or mind of man and the mind of God as a way of explicating or illustrating the coherence of the Trinity. However, theologians differ significantly in how they deploy the purported likeness between the mind of man and the triune being of God. We might think of these differences along a spectrum, stretching from a bare similitude used to illustrate some aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity to a strong psychological account of the

[283] "This sense of the meaning of person led Richard to reject the usual definition of person, as given in the sixth century by Boethius: 'person is an individual substance of a rational nature' (*persona est individua substantia rationalis naturae*)—since it could be applied either to the divine essence or to the persons, if the term *substantia* were not qualified as *subsistentia*, *modus existendi*, or some other equivalent of *hypostasis*. Richard proposed two alternative definitions: first, of 'person' in general: 'A person is something that exists through itself alone, singularly, according to a rational mode of existence' (*Persona est existens per se solum juxta singularem quemdam rationalis existentiae modum*); and second, of 'person' as one of the divine persons: 'A divine person is an incommunicable existence of a divine nature' (*Persona divina est divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia*)." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:33–34.

[284] See the discussion in Muller, *PRRD*, 4:177–84.

[285] When William Sherlock sought to refute the Socinians, he adopted a Cartesian, rather than an Aristotelian and classical understanding of the divine persons. Sherlock's Cartesianism placed "self-consciousness [as] the fundamental identifier of the individual existent," with the result that the Trinity consisted of "three individual centers of divine self-consciousness." Sherlock attempted to salvage the unity of the divine essence through total divine omniscience and mutual self-understanding among the persons. Sherlock was promptly accused of tritheism, by the orthodox and Socinians alike. Robert South, in defending orthodoxy, reasserted "the older Aristotelian scholastic language of essence, substance, existence, and subsistence, the latter term indicating the mode of existence by which a thing has its own individuality." See the discussion in Muller, *PRRD*, 4:124-128.

Trinity, which, as the name suggests, seeks to "account for" various Trinitarian claims in psychological terms. As one moves toward the former end of the spectrum, we find many qualifications, warnings, and expressions of unease about the use of the similitude. As one moves toward the latter end, the psychological analogy becomes increasingly load-bearing, and takes on the character of a central organizing principle around which other features of Trinitarian doctrine are located.

Augustine is often credited as the first to really explore the psychological analogy for the Trinity.[286] In truth, Augustine explores a number of different psychological analogies in the second half of *De Trinitate*, ultimately putting forth the triad of the mind remembering, knowing, and loving itself as an illustration of the Trinity.[287] Given the lack of evidence that Edwards read or relied upon Augustine, and the fact that Edwards's version of the psychological analogy differs from Augustine, we leave him aside and turn to Aquinas.

While it doesn't appear that Edwards had read Aquinas either, Aquinas's thought had a far greater effect on subsequent thinkers, including the Reformed orthodox whom Edwards read. Thus, it is worth giving a brief exposition of Aquinas's use of the psychological analogy. Aquinas introduces it in *Summa Theologiae* I q27 in response to the objection that, because God is immutable and simple, there can be no procession in him. Aquinas quotes John 8:42 ("I came forth from God"), notes that this must refer to an internal procession, and then seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of an internal procession by use of a creaturely analogy.

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[286] Drilling notes that early explorations of the psychological analogy, built on the Johannine testimony that the Son is the Word of God, may be found in Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Origen, and Tertullian. However, each of these thinkers mainly uses the human mind as a way of explicating the relationship between the Father and the Son, and thus do not extend the psychological analogy to include the Spirit. See Peter Drilling, "Psychological Analogy of the Trinity," *ITQ* 71 (2006): 321–22.

[287] Studebaker argues that Augustine use three forms of the psychological illustration: 1) the mind knowing and loving itself, 2) the operation of the mind remembering, knowing, and willing/loving itself, and 3) the activity of the mind remembering, knowing, and loving God. See Steve Studebaker, "Jonathan Edwards's Social Augustinian Trinitarianism: An Alternative to a Recent Trend," *SJT* 56.3 (2003): 271n6.

Whenever an intellectual agent understands something, "by the very fact of understanding there proceeds something within us, which is a conception of the object understood, a conception issuing from our intellectual power and proceeding from our knowledge of that object." This conception is called "the word of the heart," "an intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him." Such an internal procession is not distinct from the source whence it proceeds. "Indeed, the more perfectly it proceeds, the more closely it is one with the source whence it proceeds. For it is clear that the more a thing is understood, the more closely is the intellectual conception joined and united to the intelligent agent; since the intellect by the very act of understanding is made one with the object understood." Given God's perfection, he is perfectly one with the word of his heart. Thus, Aquinas identifies the Son with God's internal word, the result of an internal procession whereby God understands himself. Aquinas then notes that intellectual agents are capable of two such internal actions or processions: the first that of the intellect; the second is that of the will. This second action or procession is "that of love, whereby the object loved is in the lover."[288]

This analogy appears in numerous places in the *Summa* as a way of sorting through various theological puzzles in relation to the Trinity.[289] However, Aquinas is clear that this analogy for the Trinity is not discoverable by natural reason alone. Natural reason is able to show us those things that belong to the unity of the essence, such as the creative power of God which is common to the whole Trinity. However, it cannot give us knowledge of what belongs to the persons. Nor does the psychological analogy furnish us with sufficient proof of the Trinity.

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[288] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.27.a.2. All references are to the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[289] Neil Ormerod, "The Psychological Analogy for the Trinity: At Odds with Modernity," *Pacifica* 14.3 (2011): 282. Ormerod cites the following locations as making explicit reference to the analogy: q28 a.1, ad 4, a.4, ad 1; q30 a.2; q33 a.3, ad1; q34 a.1, a.2, a.3; q35 a.2; q36 a.1, a.2; q37 a.1; q38 a.1; q41 a.6; q42 a.5; q43 a.5. He further argues that the psychological analogy "has become the key with which to explicate the mystery of the Trinity," one that plays a "comprehensive role" in organizing Aquinas's theology of the Trinity.

Instead, it works by "confirming an already established principle, by showing the congruity of its results." Reason avails to prove the Trinity because, "when assumed to be true, reasons confirm it."[290]

Turning to the Reformed orthodox whom Edwards read, Muller notes that many of them were reluctant to engage in speculative accounts of the Trinity.[291] Some rejected such attempts altogether. Thomas Ridgley, whose *Body of Divinity* Edwards cites in the Blank Bible around 1736, argued that the Trinity is a matter of "pure revelation."[292] Demonstrating a wariness of scholastic disputation, he insisted, like many of the Reformed orthodox, that the doctrine is an incomprehensible mystery owing to "the infinite disproportion that there is between the object and our finite capacities."[293] Though not contrary to reason, the doctrine of the Trinity is above reason and our reasoning powers are only useful when they are directed by scripture-revelation.[294] Analogies and similitudes, "at best, tend only to illustrate, and not to prove a

[290] Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, q32.ad.2. The psychological image of the Trinity is not an adequate proof because "the intellect is not in God and ourselves univocally."

[291] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:165–67. "The rejection by many of the Reformed orthodox of rational and philosophical proofs of the Trinity extends even to those arguments set forth by Augustine in his *De Trinitate*: the Reformed respect for Augustine cannot dissuade them on this point. Augustine, they were convinced, had pressed rational investigation beyond its proper bounds."

[292] Thomas Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism*, ed. John M. Wilson (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 1:135. Ridgeley's *Body of Divinity* was published in 1731. On Edwards's citation of Ridgeley, see *WJE* 24:110.

[293] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:139. Thus it is incomprehensible in the way that the incommunicable attributes are incomprehensible; finite minds may apprehend some aspect of the truth, but we cannot fully comprehend the mystery of these doctrines.

[294] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:143. "We are now to consider the use of reason in proving or defending the doctrine of the Trinity, or any other doctrines of pure revelation. Though these doctrines could not have been discovered by reason, nor can every thing that is revealed be comprehended by it; yet reason is not to be laid aside as useless, and has been called by some a servant to faith. While revelation discovers what doctrines we are to believe, and demands our assent to them, reason offers a convincing proof that we are under an indispensable obligation to give it—it proves the doctrine to be true and such as is worthy of God, as it is derived from him, the fountain of truth and wisdom. This office of reason, or the subserviency of it to our faith, is certainly necessary; for what is false cannot be the object of faith in general, and nothing unworthy of God can be the matter of divine revelation or the object of a divine faith" (144–45).

doctrine."[295] Indeed, though it is not their intent, those who pretend to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity by similitudes actually tend to pervert the doctrine and prejudice its enemies. In particular, he singles out the psychological analogy for censure.

> We find them, for example, expressing themselves to this effect:—The soul of man sometimes reflects on itself, and considers its own nature, powers, and faculties, or is conversant about itself as its object, and then it produces an idea which contains the moral image of itself, and is as when a man sees his face in a glass, and beholds the image of himself; so, in the eternal generation of the Son, God, beholding himself or his divine perfections, begets an image of himself, or has an eternal idea of his own perfections in his mind, which is called his internal word, as opposed to the word spoken, which is external. By this illustration they set forth the generation of the Son; and allege that for this reason, or as the wax expresses the character or mark of the seal that is impressed on it, he is called, 'The brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.' Again, they say, that there is a mutual love between the Father and the Son, which brings forth a third Person, or Subsistence, in the Godhead, namely, the Holy Ghost. There is in the divine essence, they say, an infinite understanding reflecting on itself, whereby it begets a Son, as was before observed, and an infinite will, which leads him to reflect on himself with love and delight, as the chief good, whereby he brings forth a third Person in the Godhead, namely, the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, they describe this divine Person, as being the result of the mutual joy and delight that there is between the Father and the Son.[296]

Ridgley believed that such illustrations only confuse people, and that its advocates would do better to simply "confess this doctrine to be an inexplicable mystery."

While Ridgley eschewed all use of the psychological analogy, some like Cotton Mather were willing to give voice to it, but only reluctantly and with strong caution. In a sermon entitled "Blessed Union," Mather frames his usage of the psychological analogy in the form of a hypothetical ("if one should attempt a rational demonstration or illustration of the Trinity)," but interrupts himself to express disapproval ("though I should scarce approve the attempt!"). Despite his own reluctance, he argues that "God cannot be infinitely and absolutely perfect,

[295] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:143. "We can hardly make use of them for illustrating the doctrine of the Trinity without conveying some ideas which are unbecoming it, if not subversive of it; and while we pretend to explain that which is in itself inexplicable, we do no service to the truth."

[296] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:147.

without the Perception of himself, and an immense Joy and Love resulting therefrom, in finding himself the all-sufficient good."[297] Unlike creaturely perception and joy, which are merely modal and transient, God has an essential perception of himself and an essential love and joy in himself. Or again, "God has a substantial representation of himself within himself, and a substantial satisfaction thereupon." He then draws the lines together clearly.

> The Father is the Fountain of the Deity. The Son is the Express Image of the Father's Person, or God Essentially Representing of God, or the Eradiation of His Glorious Riches and Fulness; therefore also from all Eternity containing in Him the idea of all that was to be made in Time; The Holy Ghost is the wonderful Joy and Love, which God has in Himself by the Grateful Perception which the Father and Son Eternally have of one another.[298]

He concludes by reiterating his reluctance and disapproval of this type of psychological illustration. "I say, a working head might reach after some such conceptions; but I think one should rather chide a daring heart into a silent and quiet adoration, than go to exercise oneself in things too high for the very angels in the highest."[299]

Other Reformed theologians permitted and even encouraged the use of the psychological analogy, but gave it a short leash. Turretin argued that the mystery of the Trinity "can be solidly demonstrated from the revealed word alone." Proofs from nature and reason cannot "convince and obtain the force of solid proof." While he includes all use of similitudes in his argument, he specifically mentions the similitude of the human soul. All such similitudes "afford some resemblance to the Trinity, though very obscure as they always labor under a great dissimilitude." Such analogies ought not to be used polemically, but instead only have value "for confirming believers and showing them the credibility at least of this great mystery," provided

[297] Cotton Mather, *Blessed Unions* (Boston: Green, Allen and Phillips, 1692), 46.
[298] Mather, *Blessed Unions*, 48–49.
[299] Mather, *Blessed Unions*, 48.

that they are offered "soberly and cautiously" and as illustrations of what is already believed by virtue of Scripture alone.[300]

Likewise, Ames deploys the analogy in a very limited way to demonstrate the difference between the Son's being begotten by the Father and the Spirit's proceeding from the Father and Son. While this distinction "cannot be explained in words," nevertheless we may attempt to sketch the relationship "in part by a figure."

> The Father is, as it were, *Deus intelligens,* God understanding; the Son who is the express image of the Father, is *Deus intellectus,* God understood; and the Holy Spirit, flowing and breathed from the Father through the Son, is *Deus dilectus,* God loved. The Son is produced, so to speak, by a mental act or utterance out of the mind or fruitful memory of the Father. The Holy Spirit is produced through the act of loving or breathing from the fruitful will of the Father and the Son. Hence the Son is called Word, wisdom, and image—-designations not used of the Holy Spirit.[301]

Ames's use of the illustration is qualified repeatedly with phrases like "as it were" and "so to speak," and it does not recur in *Marrow*.

Finally, some Reformed theologians deployed the illustration more extensively after their biblical proofs in order to show the rationality of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Anglican John Edwards, in his *Theologia Reformata*, takes up the psychological analogy in order to show that the mystery of the Trinity is "in some sort adapted to Reason."[302] Noting that his rational account or "representation of the mystery" is derived from "the school-men," Edwards demonstrates the

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[300] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 3.25.4, 266. Edward Leigh shares similarities with both Ridgeley and Turretin. "We cannot by the light of nature know the mystery of the Trinity, nor the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But when by faith we receive this doctrine we may illustrate it by reason. The similes which the Schoolmen and other Divines bring, drawn from the creature, are unequal and unsatisfactory, since there can be no proportion between things Finite and Infinite." See Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (E. Griffin, 1646), Ch. 2, 16.2, 126.

[301] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 5.16, 89.

[302] John Edwards, *Theologia Reformata* (London: Lawrence, Wyat & Robinson, 1713), 322. His use of the psychological analogy comes after he has already explored the nature of the Trinity, expounded it from the Old and New Testaments, and corroborated it with statements from the church fathers (282). On the use of reason in establishing the Trinity, Edwards writes, "Though it is to be granted that it is above Reason, and beyond our Ordinary Capacities, yet Reason may be useful someways to establish it. Reason dictates to us that we must give assent to whatever is revealed to us by God, because whatever is delivered by him is certainly true." (322)

lack of weight he places on the analogy by telling his readers that they "may receive it, or reject it, as you please."

> There are, say they, no Accidents in God, and therefore the Acts of the Divine Essence, which are Internal, and have reference to Himself, are so many Persons or Hypostases. God the Father is the Original Wisdom; his Reflect Act of Knowledge is his Son, his Loving himself, and the Son, is the Holy Ghost. Thus, Wisdom, Self-reflection, and Love are the distinct Acts of the Deity, as it is a Deity; and they being really distinct are not the same, and consequently are Three Divine Subsistences or Persons. God the Father Begets the Son, (The Second Person in the Trinity) by a Reflex Act, viz. Of Knowledge: He beholds, or knows Himself, and his own Perfections, and thereby his own Essential Image is produced. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father by a direct Act of Love, i.e. God Eternally Loving and Delighting in Himself and His own Image, is the Third Person of the Trinity; and so his Procession is from the Father and the Son, that is, the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son produced, the Third Person. Thus God, who is One in Essence, is Three in Persons.
>
> This Representation of the Mystery, makes God the Father to be the Head and Fountain of the Trinity, and the Two other Divine Persons Eternally Streaming from Him; which must be resolved into the inexpressible Fecundity of the Divine Essence, the unconceivable Exuberance of the Infinite Nature of the Deity, above all other Beings whatsoever. And Reason will assist us here, by suggesting to us, that the Supreme and Immense Being is different from all others, and therefore hath Properties not communicable to any other.[303]

Despite his "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude to the analogy in his introduction, Edwards concludes his exposition by noting that such a psychological account of the Trinity avoids the absurdities of anti-trinitarians, and that by maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity along with this psychological account, "all things do wonderfully hold together, which is an Argument of the Reasonableness, as well as of the Truth of it."[304]

Thomas Stackhouse, in his *Complete Body of Divinity*, deploys the psychological analogy in order to demonstrate that divine simplicity is compatible with a distinction of hypostases in

[303] Edwards, *Theologia Reformata*, 322–23. Significantly, Edwards begins from an affirmation of divine simplicity ("there are…no accidents in God").

[304] Edwards, *Theologia Reformata*, 323. Edwards seems to be saying that while anti-trinitarians are willing to speak of the internal acts of the simple God (knowing himself and loving himself), they cannot do so intelligibly unless they are willing to grant that the God's internal acts are in fact distinct persons or hypostases.

the Godhead. Indeed the simplicity of God "necessarily infers a distinction of hypostases in the Godhead."

> For, since the Simplicity of the Godhead consists chiefly in this, that God is a pure eternal Mind, free from the Mixture of all kind of Matter whatever; an eternal Mind must needs have in it, from all Eternity, a Notion or Conception of itself, which the Schools call *Verbum Mentis*; nor can it, at any Time, be conceived without it. Now this Word cannot be in God, what it is in us, a transient vanishing Accident; for then the Divine Nature would be compounded of Substance and Accident, which would be repugnant to its Simplicity; and therefore must be a substantial subsisting Word, and though not divided, yet distinct from the eternal Mind, from whence it proceeds.[305]

According to Stackhouse, far from being a mere novel subtlety of the schools, this line of argument runs through all the church fathers, and finds sufficient foundation in Scripture. However, at this point, Stackhouses's argument from the Eternal Mind's knowing itself does not prove a Trinity, but only that "a distinction of persons in the Godhead is very consistent with its simplicity;" indeed, such a distinction necessarily follows.

Later in his work, Stackhouse, like John Edwards, seeks to better conceive of the mystery of the Trinity by framing something that carries in it "a Shadow and Resemblance of one single undivided Nature's casting itself into three subsistences." To that end, he posits a psychological analogy for the Trinity.

> 1. An infinite rational Mind, which considered under the first and original Perfection of Being or Existence, may be called the Father. 2. In the same infinite Mind we may consider the Perfection of Understanding, as immediately resulting from the Perfection of Existence, which may be called the Son: and then, 3. When that Infinite Mind, by its Understanding, reflects upon its own essential Perfections, and cannot but love and take Pleasure therein, that Act of Love and Volition, arising from an intellectual Reflection upon them, may be called the Holy Ghost. Here then we see, that one and the same Mind is both Being, Understanding, and Willing; and yet we can neither say that Being is Understanding, nor Understanding, Willing; nor on the contrary, can we say that Understanding is merely Being, or that Willing is Understanding.[306]

[305] Thomas Stackhouse, *A Complete Body of Divinity* (London: Batley, 1729), 117–18. Judging from citations in *the Blank Bible*, Edwards was likely aware of Stackhouse's *Body of Divinity* by 1737.

[306] Stackhouse, *Complete Body of Divinity*, 128–29.

However, even this illustration is only "a distant Resemblance." It is not "an adequate similitude" nor does it "bring down the mysteriousness of the doctrine to our apprehension." It's purpose is only to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is not absurd.[307]

Keckermann, in contrast to Turretin, believed that the psychological analogy is useful in refuting anti-trinitarians by showing that "God cannot be God, unless He have three distinct modes of existing or persons."[308] He argues that God's knowledge is infinite and eternal like the essence itself. "But eternal knowledge has an eternal object…[which] is none other than God Himself." God's knowledge "bends back from eternity upon itself…just as the soul thinks of itself." This production of an image of himself is "rightly called conception and generation" and it posits a second person, the Son of God. Likewise with God's will. "As He knows Himself as the most perfect *ens,* so by His will He desires and wills Himself as the supreme and most perfect good."[309]

> Whereas the Father conceives and with most perfect will desires the image of Himself, His Son: it follows that the most perfect love and the fullest pleasure proceed from Father to Son and from Son to Father, as from image to archetype; and that so by the conjunction of the knowledge and will of both a third mode of existence or person is posited in the divine essence, called the Holy Spirit.[310]

Keckermann regards this analogy as a demonstration "from the very essence of God, by unchangeable principles" that there are three persons in the single divine essence. He goes so far as to summarize it in a single syllogism.

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[307] Muller mentions Keckermann, Ainsworth, Burman, and Baxter as others who, in Thomistic fashion, did use the psychological analogy as an *a posteriori* demonstration of the Trinity. See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:162.

[308] Quoted in Heinrick Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thomas (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 106. Muller notes that Keckermann is somewhat unique among the Reformed scholastics in that he "went so far as to develop on Augustinian and Thomist lines a series of rational metaphors or arguments for the triune nature of God in his theological system. His approach was to draw on the view of God as exercising intellect and will and to associate Word with intellect and Spirit with will, particularly the will as exercised in an act of love." While few followed Keckermann in his emphasis on the rational provability of the Trinity, the psychological image became common among the Reformed. See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:85.

[309] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 107.

[310] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 107.

> In an essence in which there is perfect knowledge bending back upon itself, an Image is begotten and a Spirit proceeds on the impulse of the will. And yet these things inhere in the one, most single essence of God. Therefore there will be in the same essence the Begetter, the begotten Image and the proceeding Spirit.[311]

In sum, the Reformed orthodox held a variety of views about the usefulness and value of the psychological analogy for the Trinity. Some restricted its use altogether (Ridgley). Others reluctantly expressed it, while discouraging others to use it (Mather). Still others commended it in a restricted sense as a confirmation for believers (Turretin) or deployed it in a narrow way as an illustration (Ames). Others, following Aquinas, make extensive use of the analogy as a way of showing the reasonableness of the doctrine of the Trinity to both believers and unbelievers (Edwards, Stackhouse). Finally, in rare instances, some use the psychological analogy as a syllogism demonstrating that God must be triune (Keckermann).

3.5 Chevalier Ramsay

Moving outward from the Reformed tradition, we come to Andrew Michael Ramsay. Given the fact that Edwards quotes Ramsay's use of the psychological analogy, it is worth spending some time exploring Ramsay's deployment of the analogy.[312] In the first volume of his *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion,* Ramsay sought to demonstrate the concord between reason and revelation with respect to Christian doctrine.[313] "Revelation never

[311] Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 107–8. Mastricht likewise summarizes the psychological analogy as set forth by the medieval scholastics: "Reason teaches that God knows; of this knowledge is born the idea or image; and since the thing known is something good, love arises: but since the image and also the love are not accidents in God but substance, it cannot but be that there is one substance in Knower, Known and Loved. Hence they called the Father God knowing, the Son God known, and the Holy Spirit God loved." Again, note the role of divine simplicity in preserving the single divine essence in the face of the intellectual triad.

[312] It's important to note that Edwards encountered Ramsay's work in 1751, years after he had formulated his own argument in *Discourse*. Thus, while Ramsay's Trinitarianism is in many respects consonant with Edwards, Edwards is not dependent upon Ramsay for his formulation.

[313] "We endeavor to demonstrate in the first part of the following essay, 'that the great principles of natural religion are founded upon the most invincible evidence; and that the essential doctrines of revelation are perfectly conformable to reason.'" See The Chevalier Ramsay, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Glasgow: Robert Poulis, 1748), iv.

contradicts reason," and "philosophy…as an handmaid may very well be employed to show that religion is perfectly conformable to reason."[314] In setting forth his demonstration, Ramsay primarily targets Deists, Socinians, and Unitarians, and engages especially with Locke, Spinoza, and the medieval schoolmen. Ramsay's fundamental axiom, which he claims is shared by all thinkers, whether Christian, deist, or atheist, is "the simple idea of a self-existent being."[315] Proceeding in "geometric order," Ramsay establishes through his first eight propositions that there is a single, simple, self-existent, necessary, and absolutely infinite mind.[316] His next four propositions pertain especially to the Trinity.

First, he argues that "the absolutely infinite mind must be infinitely, eternally, and essentially active and productive of an absolutely infinite effect."[317] Second, this absolutely infinite effect "can be no other than its own idea, image, or representation."[318] Third, God's eternal, permanent, and consubstantial idea thus "produces necessarily in him an infinite, eternal immutable love."[319] Finally, this love "is not a simple attribute, mode, or perfection of the divine mind; but a living, active, consubstantial intelligent being or agent."[320] Reason is thus sufficient

[314] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, iii-iv.

[315] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, vi. "This is the seed which contains the hidden tree, with all its roots, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits."

[316] God's absolute infinity entails his eternality and immensity, both of which Ramsay conceives of in classical theistic terms. He insists that God's eternity is not merely his existence at all times, but a duration without succession, adopting the Boethian understanding of eternal duration as "the full actual, permanent possession of all reality and perfection." See Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 52. Similarly, God's immensity is not merely his presence in all places, but the absence of all extension. However, Ramsay chastises the medieval schoolmen for needlessly complicating the simplicity of these statements and instead commends the *via negativa* as the preferred way of speaking of God's absolute attributes. "[God] exists everywhere and always without extension and without succession. This is all we should say; and if we have departed from this simplicity, it was rather to confute error, than explain truth. The simplest ideas and the simplest expressions are the best, when we speak of the simplest of all beings; and the removing of all imperfections by negative propositions, is safer than attempts by affirmative ones to explain what is incomprehensible" (72).

[317] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 74.

[318] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 77.

[319] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 81.

[320] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 85.

to tell us that the divine essence may be represented under three notions: infinitely active mind, infinite idea, and infinite love, or again, as Life, Light, and Love.[321]

At this point, Ramsay notes that, to these rational notions, revelation superadds that these three are not only eternal *acts*, but principles of action, or distinct *agents*. In expressing this point, Ramsay attempts to thread a tight needle. On the one hand, he wishes to insist that the Mind, Idea, and Love are distinct, self-conscious agents who "subsist and act in the eternal essence, *as if* they were really three different independent minds."[322] However, he is equally clear that they are *not* actually three independent minds, but only a single, infinitely absolute mind.[323] Calling these distinct agents "persons" or "hypostases," Ramsay argues that they are metaphysically unanalyzable and constitute a profound mystery. Idea and love, which in creatures are simple modalities, powers, or virtues, are, in God, distinct self-conscious agents. At the same time, "The three persons of the Trinity have the *same* self-consciousness. They all exist, and act, in, by, and with each other; so that the action of the Father, tho' distinct, is never separated from that of the Son or Holy Ghost: and this is what the Schools call circumincession."[324]

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[321] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 88.

[322] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 88. In threading the needle, Ramsay repeatedly uses this "as if" formula to speak of the psychological account. Compare the following: "They are real agents, beings, and living principles of action, distinct from their source; so that God is known by one and loved by the other, *as if* they were really distinct substances" (89); "God's immanent effects must be absolutely infinite agents, beings, or realities, tho' not different substances; because, as we have shown, there can be one only absolutely infinite mind" (91); "Hence in talking of the three persons of the blessed Trinity we may speak of them *as if* they were three distinct beings, agents, and powers, providing we mean neither more nor less by these expressions, than three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial personalities, whose operations are so perfectly different, that the action of the one, is not that of the other; tho' they all exist, subsist, and act in, by, and with each other, in one indivisible substance" (98).

[323] Tan calls this a "tritheist undertone" in Ramsay's thought, derived from the Boethian definition of person as "three self-aware *res*." See Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 46. Nevertheless, Ramsay clearly denies the major Trinitarian heresies in favor of Nicea.

[324] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 91.

A number of features of Ramsay's account are worth highlighting. First, divine simplicity and pure act are essential for his account of the Trinity. It is God's infinite and absolute activity, conceived as a necessary perfection, that demands that God eternally, immanently, and necessarily act to produce an effect.[325] Additionally, God's essence is "simple, uncompounded, and indivisible," and it is this simplicity which accounts for the fact that God's immanent acts (i.e. Son and the Spirit) "must partake of all the divine perfections" and be "like himself, and equal to himself in all things, self-origination only excepted."[326]

Second, Ramsay speaks of the distinction between the persons as a real distinction. "We may conceive in the divine nature three real distinctions, and we can conceive no more." Given his full-throated affirmation of divine simplicity, we ought to regard this real distinction as a real minor distinction, according to Turretin's use of the term. The distinction in question is neither a distinction of mode, attribute, or substance, but an incomprehensible distinction of persons, which enables us to speak of distinct intelligence, activity, and self-consciousness without constituting three separate minds.[327] What's more, Ramsay is adamant that there are three distinctions and there can be no more. "All that we can conceive of the absolutely infinite essence may be reduced to some one of these three distinctions, realities, somethings, beings, or personalities."[328]

Third, the incomprehensibility of the mystery means that all metaphors for the Trinity, either from the Scriptures or the fathers, are inadequate to the truth. They are "lame, defective,

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[325] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 76–77.

[326] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 90. Note that Ramsay distinguishes the persons solely by relation of origin.

[327] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 92. He repeatedly claims that this distinction is unknown among finite beings and we "cannot comprehend [this distinction] till we see God as he is."

[328] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 94. Ramsay makes the following identifications: 1) Eternal Father, Infinite Force, Essential Life, Flaming Center, Fiery Source. 2) Only begotten Son, Consubstantial Image, Eternal Word, Coessential Wisdom, Uncreated Light. 3) Breath of God's Mouth, Coeternal Love, Infinite Justice, Absolute Goodness, Holy Ghost or Spirit.

and dissimilar; as all comparisons borrowed from finite must be, when applied to infinite."[329] Even the psychological analogy of mind, idea, and love is "absolutely inconceivable in an eternal, infinite essence that exists and acts without diffusion, division, or limitation."

Fourth, Ramsay distinguishes the role of reason, revelation, and the beatific vision in understanding the mystery of the Trinity. "Reason proves that this mystery is possible; Revelation assures us that it is true; heaven alone can show us how it is."[330] Ramsay argues that the mystery does not lie in the infinite eternal activity of God, nor in the immanent effects of producing an infinite idea or infinite love, nor in denying that these immanent acts are three independent minds, nor in limiting the immanent acts of God to his understanding and will, his consubstantial idea and his coessential love. All of these are demonstrable by reason. Instead, the mystery lies in "how these three distinctions, in one eternal, indivisible, and uncompounded substance, can be three real, distinct, intelligent, self-conscious agents and persons."[331] It is this last mystery that is illuminated and established by revelation.

Fifth, in defining a divine person as an intelligent, self-conscious agent, Ramsay is attempting to set forth an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity that is unencumbered by the scholastic vocabulary surrounding person-language in the Trinity. He notes that such scholastic, "barbarous, Arabick, and Aristotelian jargon" is precisely wherein the Socinians and Deists found their greatest foothold against the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.[332] At the same time, in rejecting the scholastic vocabulary, he seeks to maintain the orthodox doctrine over against not only tritheism, Sabellianism, and Arianism, but also against "the formal heresy of some great

[329] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 94.
[330] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 95.
[331] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 95–96.
[332] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 96.

modern divines."[333] By this, Ramsay seems to have in mind the subordinationism of Clarke, which he describes as a "refined sort of Arianism" in which there is one supreme and two subordinate intellectual agents, with the two subordinate agents being "free, tho' eternal productions of the divine mind."[334] Ramsay especially objects to the notion that the Son and the Spirit are free acts of God's power and will, instead insisting that the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit are necessary, immanent acts of God.

Sixth, Ramsay locates God's absolute self-sufficiency and happiness, as well as the freedom and contingency of creation, precisely in this account of the Trinity. "The generation of the Logos, and the procession of the Holy Ghost, or the knowledge and love God has of his pure and absolute essence are alone sufficient to complete his infinite perfection and happiness."[335] He is clear that creation in no way contributes to God's absolute felicity.[336] This doctrine of the Trinity enables us to avoid the error that is common to Aristotelians, Deists, Socinians, Unitarians, Muslims, and Spinoza—namely that they "look upon God's still eternity, and solitude, as a state of inaction and indolence." In other words, the common error of these views is the notion that God's activity requires creation. In contrast, Ramsay contends that orthodox Trinitarianism upholds both the self-sufficiency of God and the contingence of creation by distinguishing the immanent and necessary acts of generation and spiration from the external and free acts of the conception of finite things and creation.[337]

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[333] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 98.
[334] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 98.
[335] Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 98.
[336] "The creation of finite cannot interest nor augment the essential happiness and perfection of the divine nature; otherwise God would not be self-sufficient. The production of numberless worlds can add nothing to his plenitude; because all that he can produce without himself, is still infinitely inferior to what he possesses within." Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 103.
[337] Ramsay brings these two elements together in the following quotation: "God knows and loves himself without succession. His infinite understanding is commensurate to its infinite object; which offers him still the same boundless felicity, and all the three are equal to each other…In this eternal intercourse, and communication among the persons of the sacred Trinity, God employs a whole eternity without beginning and without end. This is the

Finally, Ramsay's recapitulation of this section at the end of volume 1, which Edwards quotes in Miscellany 1180, adequately summarizes his position.

> The eternal, self-existent, infinite Being presents himself to the mind under the notion of a simple, uncompounded, indivisible essence, without distinction of parts, without succession of thoughts, and without division of substance: yet he contains necessarily the three real distinctions of *spirit conceiving, idea conceived*, and *love proceeding* from both; which in the supreme infinite are not three simple attributes, or modes; but three distinct persons, or self-conscious, intellectual agents. The infinite spirit, by a necessary, immanent, eternal activity, produces in himself his consubstantial image equal to him in all his perfections, self-origination only excepted; and from both proceed a distinct, self-conscious, intelligent, active principle of love co-equal to the Father and the Son, called the Holy Ghost. This is the true definition of God in his eternal solitude, or according to his absolute essence distinct from created nature.[338]

3.6 Edwards on the Psychological Analogy

From this survey of the background to Edwards's use of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, two conclusions may be drawn. First, in terms of his method of argument in the *Discourse on the Trinity,* while Edwards does not directly respond or even mention Clarke, he does adopt a polemical strategy designed to co-opt and subvert Clarke's arguments. The polemical strategy is one that he employs in a number of controversies with deists, moral philosophers, and other thinkers who object to traditional Christian doctrines because they find them to be contrary to the dictates of reason. Put simply, rather than argue directly from Scripture, he begins from theological premises shared with his opponents and then reasons from these premises to demonstrate the reasonableness (and even necessity) of contested orthodox

central abyss of the pure and absolute essence of God; his still eternity and his eternal solitude; wherein he hears nothing but his consubstantial word, he sees nothing but his coessential image, and loves nothing but his only begotten Son. This eternal commerce of the coeternal THREE is the secret fund of the Deity, of which we can form no idea till we be lost and immersed in our center, 'see light in his light, and behold him as he is.' Then we shall see how the paternal mind conceives within himself the consubstantial image, and how from both proceeds the loving spirit, by two permanent, immanent coeternal acts, wherein no idea of multiplicity, variation, or succession can enter. All the archetypal ideas of finite; of nature material or immaterial; of created beings, and all their possible combinations are free acts of the divine understanding, as the production and beatification of fines are free acts of his power and goodness." Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 99–100.

[338] *WJE* 23:95, quoting Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, 484.

conclusions. For example, in his dissertation *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, he begins from four assumptions or axioms which he knows he shares with his interlocutors: 1) God is unchangeably happy and self-sufficient in himself; 2) Creation is *ex nihilo*; 3) God has an end in creation; and 4) God operates according to the principle of proportionate regard.[339] Edwards's argument in chapter 1 of *End of Creation* boils down to this: if you accept these four axioms, then you must accept Edwards's conclusion that God's original, ultimate end in creation is the communication of his internal glory *ad extra*. All other options fail because they compromise one or more of the shared axioms. After demonstrating the reasonableness of his conclusions according to reason's dictates, Edwards then shows the Scriptural affirmation and confirmation of these conclusions in Chapter 2 of the *End*. Similarly in the *Discourse on the Trinity*, Edwards begins from axioms shared with his anti-Trinitarian opponents in order to show that their own convictions necessitate (or at least, are consonant with) the orthodox confession of the Trinity *and* better account for the testimony of Scripture.[340] Grant that God is a person (that is, that he has an understanding and a will that are really distinct from one another) and that (importantly) he is simple, pure act, and a subordinationist like Clarke (or even a committed deist!) might be compelled to confess, by sure and certain deductions, that orthodox Trinitarianism is true after all.

[339] For a full treatment of *End of Creation* along these lines, see Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Philosophical Argument for God's End in Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 297–326.

[340] The difference between Edwards's interlocutors for *End of Creation* and the anti-Trinitarians like Clarke is that the former were moral philosophers such as Frances Hutcheson and the Earl of Shaftesbury who respected but did not feel bound by Scripture. The anti-Trinitarians, on the other hand, were almost always "Biblicists who sought to wield *sola scriptura* against orthodox (mainly metaphysical) doctrines such as the Trinity." See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 33. Strobel quotes Clarke quoting Chillingworth thusly, "The Bible, I say, the BIBLE only, is the religion of the Protestants. Whatsoever else they believe besides it, and the plain, irrefragable, indubitable consequences of it; well may they hold it as a matter of opinion: but as a matter of faith and religion, neither can they, with coherence to their own grounds, believe it themselves; nor require the belief of it of others, without most high and most schismatical presumption." See Clarke, *Scripture-Doctrine*, x–xi.

Second, the evidence presented here makes it clear that Edwards was not alone in leaning on a psychological analogy to understand the Trinity. But how should his use of the analogy be classified in light of his Reformed forebears? While Edwards does say that the psychological analogy illustrates many orthodox claims about the Trinity, his use of the analogy transcends bare illustration. Instead, Edwards offers a strong psychological account of the Trinity.[341] Or, to say it more precisely, Edwards offers a psychological account of God's happiness, which he then correlates with orthodox Trinitarian doctrine, such that he offers a psychological account of the Trinity itself.[342] For Edwards, this psychological account is theologically load-bearing; it is a kind of key that illuminates many of Scripture's claims about the three persons of the Godhead. Like the Anglican Edwards and Stackhouse, Jonathan Edwards sees a firm agreement and concord between the Bible's teaching and the psychological account. The account, as Edwards exposits it, is "abundantly confirmed by the Word of [God]."[343] It "is exceeding analogous to the gospel scheme, and agreeable to the tenor of the whole New Testament, and abundantly illustrative of gospel doctrines."[344] Edwards believed that the Word of God furnishes us with far more knowledge and clarity about the Trinity than we have heretofore taken note of. His account is an attempt to illuminate the Word of God so that we have a clearer sight of who God is.

Moreover, the psychological account is theologically fruitful. By accounting for the Trinity in psychological terms, we see why orthodox theologians have so often claimed that the

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[341] See Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 40n4. Strobel notes that Edwards doesn't seem to be "employing an analogy at all." A threefold delineation of mind, understanding and will "is just what it means to be personal: God or human." Significantly, Strobel notes, "While Edwards collapses God and humanity within the broader category of 'personal creatures,' he reinforces his Creator/creature distinction through his use of infinity." The use of the term "personal creatures" here is unfortunate; it would be better to say that God and humans (and angels) are both persons. However, Strobel is correct to identify divine infinitude (along with divine simplicity) as the marker of the Edwardsean Creator-creature divide.

[342] See Paul Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 93–106.

[343] *WJE* 21:117.

[344] *WJE* 21:134.

Father is "the fountain of the Godhead" and has a distinct priority in the economy of the persons of the Trinity, a useful point in the anti-trinitarian controversy. At the same time, we see the coequality and coeternality of the three persons, and why the Spirit must proceed from both Father and Son. In fact, Edwards's psychological account elevates the dignity of the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption so that he has a distinct yet equal honor with the Father and Son. If the Spirit only applies or gives or hands redemption to us, then his work is a little thing compared to the Father's giving of his infinitely valuable Son, and the Son willingly offering himself up on our behalf. But, on Edwards's account, the Holy Spirit *is* the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, the sum of all the good things purchased for us in the gospel. Thus, the psychological account plays a central role in Edwards's theology as a whole.

At the same time, like others in the Reformed tradition, Edwards does not believe that the psychological account of the Trinity derogates from the mystery of the doctrine. The account does not explain the Trinity "so as to render it no longer a mystery." Many questions remain unanswered; many puzzles are still unsolvable. In line with the view of Ridgley and others, many things about the doctrine are still incomprehensible. In fact, Edwards's account has actually served to increase "the number of those things that appear mysterious, wonderful and incomprehensible."[345]

In contrast to those like Ridgley and Mather who urged a silent adoration of God over against the speculative use of analogies, Edwards believed that humbly and faithfully probing the rationality of the Trinity produced *greater* awe and wonder at God. Far from diminishing the mystery, such attentiveness to the depths of the doctrine increase the visible mysteries by revealing that God has told us more about himself than has generally been observed. Just as the

[345] *WJE* 21:139.

New Testament reveals more about the nature of God than the Old Testament, and thereby increases the number of visible mysteries; just as the use of microscopes gives us greater knowledge and clarity about the natural world and thereby multiples the number of wonders that we can see; so also, Edwards's account of the Trinity, insofar as it is a faithful accounting of the testimony of Scripture concerning the triune God, increases the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity for those who employ it. Thus, unlike some of his Reformed forebears, Edwards expresses little reluctance in offering a psychological account of the Trinity, but instead commends it as biblically faithful, theologically fruitful, and practically useful for awakening wonder and worship.

CHAPTER 4 AN EXPOSITION OF *DISCOURSE ON THE TRINITY*

4.1 Introduction

With that background, we are now prepared to examine the *Discourse* itself.[346] Edwards began the *Discourse* in the early 1730's, writing a significant portion of it in a short amount of time.[347] In subsequent years, he would return to the document, revising what he'd already written and eventually appending discrete entries at the end. For the purposes of interpretation, this means that the bulk of the *Discourse* may be read as a more or less cohesive argument, whereas the final entries have more of the character of miscellanies.

4.2 Exposition of the *Discourse*

The first two paragraphs of the *Discourse* are essential in framing the overall argument of the work. Edwards begins with God's happiness.[348] Indeed, these two paragraphs (and perhaps the whole discourse) are merely an unpacking and expounding upon the meaning of God's happiness.[349] He is offering an "account" of God's happiness, one that he thinks will be found to be both reasonable and Scriptural by his readers.

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[346] For additional treatments of Edwards's Trinitarianism, see Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 5–51; William Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 66; Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Paul Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 93–106; Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 21–72.

[347] *WJE* 21:107.

[348] Thomas G. Weinandy, "Jonathan Edwards: 'Discourse on the Trinity,'" in *The Ecumenical Edwards*, ed. Kyle Stobel (London: Routledge, 2017), 68. "Happiness is the predetermined known datum for detecting the ontological reality of the divine intellect and will" (69).

[349] In describing the apologetic nature of Edwards's discourse, Weinandy notes the shrewdness of beginning with a truth that even his anti-Trinitarian opponents will accept. "If everyone agreed that God is happy, then Edwards could argue for a divine intellect and will on which such happiness needs be founded, and ultimately, then, for the existence of the Son as the one in whom and the Holy Spirit as the one by whom God finds delight." Weinandy, "Discourse on the Trinity," 69.

Edwards first rephrases God's happiness as "God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself."[350] This expanded phrase is then further explained in terms of God's "perfectly beholding and infinitely loving, and rejoicing in, his own essence and perfections," with the latter two activities (loving and rejoicing) as mutually identical and mutually interpreting.[351] Thus, God's happiness is glossed as 1) God's beholding his essence and perfections and 2) God loving/rejoicing in his essence and perfections. This gloss is dependent upon Edwards's notion of personhood, which he here assumes and only later identifies.

Edwards's next theological move is to expound and relate these two acts in terms of idealism and in terms of logical dependence. For God to behold his essence is to have "a most perfect idea of himself…in actual view."[352] And then, from this actual view of God's idea/image/representation, there arises a "perfect energy" that simply is "the divine love, complacence and joy" (confirming that these are indeed mutually interpreting terms). Thus, from

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[350] *WJE* 21:113.

[351] On the identity of love and joy, see below.

[352] Weinandy criticizes Edwards for adopting a Lockean approach to knowledge. He claims that Edwards does not "possess the proper philosophical tools" (Weinandy, "Discourse on the Trinity," 76). Weinandy claims that, for Edwards, ideas mediate between the knower and the object the idea represents. He thus claims that, according to Edwards, we know ideas of things, but not things themselves. By contrast, Edwards's claim is that we know *things* by *idea*. Thus, when Weinandy says, "Since to see the idea is, 'to all intents and purposes,' the same as seeing the thing what we actually see is not the thing but the idea," (74), he is drawing the wrong conclusion. The whole point of Edward's equivalence at this point is to avoid the dichotomy at the end of the sentence. We must not place an opposition or dichotomy between 'actually seeing the thing' and 'seeing the perfect idea of the thing.'

Weinandy's error becomes apparent when he claims "There is no need for a mediating idea by and in which the Father knows the Son, because there is no ontological separateness between the Father and the Son" (75). But Edwards does not claim that there is a mediating idea *between* Father and Son. Edwards's claim is that the Son *is* the Father's idea. In other words, the following three expressions are equivalent: God knows himself = God has a perfect idea of himself = the Father knows the Son. Weinandy's view, in its concern to avoid ontological separateness, appears to run the risk of collapsing personal distinctiveness, which is what a psychological analogy or account attempts to provide. Edwards wants to distinguish God-as-Knower (Father) and God-as-Object of knowledge (Son). Weinandy's interpretation of Edwards doesn't allow for a sufficient distinction between knower and known. On his view, there can be no "real distinction" as Edwards puts it between God and his idea. Weinandy's confusion is also apparent in his elision between God, the Father, and the Son, as in the following quotation: "The Son/Word proceeds from the Father not by way of a perfect idea of the Father on which the Father gazes and so knows himself, as if there were a 'separateness' between God and the Son. Rather, in the very ontological act of begetting the Son in his perfect likeness the Father knows the Son as his perfect likeness" (75). The move from Father-Son language to God-Son language and back to Father-Son language is an equivocation that betrays a confusion on Weinandy's part.

the fact of God's infinite happiness, Edwards derives that 1) God has a perfect idea of himself (i.e. of his essence and perfections) and 2) God loves and delights in that idea.

In the next paragraph, Edwards anticipates an objection to accounting for God's happiness in terms of a perfect idea of himself and a perfect love toward himself. Someone might object that God's perfection means that he doesn't understand "by idea" nor does he have inclination and love as we do. Thus, God's perfection would mean that we need *not* necessarily suppose that God's happiness is understood in terms of God having a perfect idea of himself and perfectly loving himself. In responding to this objection, Edwards demonstrates his continuity with the Reformed tradition by affirming three core elements of classical theology: analogical knowledge of God, the Creator-creature divide, and divine simplicity. The first sentence establishes that our knowledge of God is analogical; that is, there is a likeness and unlikeness between God and humans.[353] "Though we cannot conceive of the manner of the divine understanding, yet if it be understanding or anything that can be anyway signified by that word of ours, it is by idea." Notice that Edwards acknowledges that "understanding" is our word for something that bears some resemblance to something in God. At the same time, he affirms that we have no notions of how, or in what manner, God himself knows. Thus, without using the term "analogy," Edwards has embraced its substance. Or, to put it another way, Edwards has posited something like the archetypal-ectypal distinction between God's knowledge and our own.[354]

[353] Though Edwards does not use the term analogy to discuss predication, Michael McClymond has argued that the term "proportion" is a fruitful way to explore Edwards's thinking on the subject, since proportion is the Latinate equivalent of the Greek *analogia*. See Michael McClymond, "Analogy: A Neglected Theme in Jonathan Edwards and Its Pertinence to Contemporary Theological Debates," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 6.2 (2016); Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 65–67.

[354] See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 155–76.

The archetypal-ectypal distinction is often regarded as "the epistemological corollary of the Creator-creature distinction."[355] Thus, it is no surprise that the next sentence roots this analogical account of the divine understanding in the likeness and unlikeness of God and creatures. "Though the divine nature be vastly different from that of created spirits, yet our souls are made in the image of God."[356] Edwards further explains the likeness and unlikeness between God and creatures by employing his understanding of the image of God: "we have understanding and will, idea and love, as God hath, and the difference is only in the perfection of degree and manner."[357] In saying this, Edwards is arguing that the likeness between God and man as his image-bearer lies in our shared personhood. As he will say later in the *Discourse,* a person is "that which hath understanding and will."[358] This definition applies equally to God and to creatures (though, as he notes here, not without qualification). Thus, for Edwards, a person is an "intelligent voluntary being."[359] Edwards regards human personhood as basic, evident to us "by our own immediate consciousness."[360] In a number of miscellanies, Edwards reasons from this immediate perception of human personhood to the existence of the first cause as an intelligent, voluntary agent. Miscellany 749 contains the most detailed exposition.[361] The basic argument is that the world clearly manifests a goal-directedness—"the constitution of the world, in all parts

[355] Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 17.

[356] *WJE* 21:113.

[357] In this, Edwards's view of the soul is consonant with Locke, who identified perception (or thinking) and volition (or willing) as "the two great and principal Actions of the Mind." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 2.6.2, 128. "The Power of Thinking is called the *Understanding*, and the Power of Volition is called the *Will*, and these two Powers or Abilities in the Mind are denominated *Faculties*."

[358] *WJE* 21:133–34.

[359] *WJE* 20:154.

[360] *WJE* 18:396.

[361] See also "544. Christian Religion" in *WJE* 18:90; "896. Being of God. God and Intelligent, Voluntary Being" in *WJE* 20:154.

of it, is with respect to final causes"[362]—and that goal-directedness entails a cause that is an intelligent and voluntary agent. "If the world be disposed and ordered for an end, then there must have been some being that has disposed and ordered it for that end."[363] This "being ordered to an end" or goal-directedness cannot be immanent to the world, and it cannot be from nothing, since both imply a contradiction. Thus, there must be an efficient cause for the world, and this efficient cause must be an intelligent voluntary agent.

Contained within this argument are a number of features that characterize intelligent, voluntary agents (= persons). First, persons act and produce effects. Second, persons are goal-directed—they have regard for final causes which are as yet future and have no actual being. Third, persons have a *present* regard to the *future*, final cause by representing it to the mind in the form of an idea.[364]

> But this future thing, that has no actual existence yet, has a present existence some way or other, otherwise it could have no present influence in any effect at all…But there is no other way that that which has no actual existence can have existence but only by having existence in the understanding, or in some idea.[365]

Fourth, the ideas of future things are present with the agent "so as to determine it in acting."[366] Intelligent beings determine things "by choice…rejecting the bad and choosing the good." Thus, future possibilities are present to the agent in the form of representations in the understanding, and from these possibilities, the agent chooses one and makes it his end.

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[362] *WJE* 18:392.

[363] *WJE* 18:392.

[364] "But there is no representation present with an efficient to make that aim at the thing represented, as that for which he effects, but an idea, no other representation, but a perceived representation." *WJE* 18:395.

[365] *WJE* 18:393. Edwards summarizes his three signs of intelligence: "(1) that he acts and produces effects; and (2) that in acting or producing effects, he shows that things not present in their actual existence are yet some way present with him as in idea, by a conformity of his acts to things distant or future, as it is in one that conceives of things distant and future; and (3) that he acts with design, or [by] aiming at that which is future." See *WJE* 18:394.

[366] *WJE* 18:395.

To summarize, a person is that which has understanding and will. Understanding and will enable a person to do things for final causes by representing future possible things as present in the form of ideas, and then choosing from future possibilities to make one of the possibles his final cause.[367]

Returning to the *Discourse*, human beings are like God, in that we both have understanding and will, and yet there is still a vast difference between God and man, both in terms of degree and manner.[368] While Edwards does not explain the difference in degree, we are perhaps warranted in concluding that he is referring to divine infinity. God's being and nature are infinitely above our own.[369] Thus, whatever likeness there is between divine and human understanding, or divine and human will, there is still an infinite gap that makes them very unlike.[370]

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[367] *WJE* 20:155. God "has given intelligent creatures understanding and will to that end, that he might enable 'em to act for final causes, and have respect to that which is future." Elsewhere, Edwards draws three corollaries from the fact that God is a person. First, it is rational to worship him by "prayer, confession, praise and thanksgiving," since these actions treat God as a "properly intelligent voluntary being." Second, it's rational to suppose that God should make some REVELATION of himself to his intelligent creatures by his Word," that is, that he should speak to us. Third, it's rational to suppose that God would exercise moral government over the world in "giving laws, promising rewards and threatening punishments, and appointing a judgment," and other such activities, and that this moral government would include both fixed and unvaried laws of nature, as well as arbitrary acts and dispensations by which he intervenes in history as an intelligent voluntary agent. See *WJE* 18:397.

[368] Weinandy mistakenly contrasts Edwards with Aquinas at this point, claiming that Edwards distinguishes divine and human knowing only by degree, and not by kind (*Ecumenical Edwards*, 75). But the word "manner" is a synonym for "kind," stressing that God's way of knowing is different from creatures, because he is simple. Barone makes the same mistake in regarding the difference between God's faculties and man's faculties as only quantitative and not qualitative. See Marco Barone, "The Relationship between God's Nature, God's Image in Man, and Freedom in the Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8.1 (2018): 41.

[369] That the word "degree" signals divine infinity is confirmed later in the *Discourse* when Edwards writes, "This is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible." Here we see both degree and manner used, but with appropriate adjectives (infinite and perfect). *WJE* 21:121.

[370] *WJE* 18:396–97. "We have all reason to think that this first cause of all things, that is the cause of all perception and intelligence in the world, is not only not an unintelligent, unknowing, and insensible being, but that he is infinitely the most intelligent and sensible being of all; that he is more perceiving than any; that his perception is so much more sensible and lively and perfect; that created minds are in comparison of him like dead, senseless, unperceiving substances; and that he infinitely more exceeds them in the sensibility and life and height (if I may so speak) of his perception than the sun exceeds the planets, in the intensive degree of his brightness, as well as the bulk or extent of his shining disk. And as he is more sensible, so he is as I may express it more voluntary than created minds. He acts more of himself, infinitely more purely active, and in no respect passive, as all created minds are in a great measure passive in their acts of will. And the acts of will are more voluntary. Though there be no

Edwards does however explain what he means by the different "manner" that distinguishes Creator from creature. Put simply, the perfection of the manner of God's being ("the divine nature") is that he is simple.[371] Significantly, Edwards argues for a threefold simplicity in God.

1) In God, there is no distinction between power/habit and act.
2) In God's understanding, there is no distinction between perception/idea and reasoning/judgment (with one notable and important exception).[372]
3) In God's will, there is no distinction between faculty/habit and act, or, to put it another way, between will/inclination and love.[373]

Thus, God's perfection does mean that he is both infinite and simple. His understanding is simple, consisting in "the mere perception and unvaried presence of his infinitely perfect idea [of himself]." His will is simple, consisting in "one simple act." However, divine simplicity doesn't overthrow the likeness between God and creatures made in his image. His understanding is, like ours, by idea, and he does in fact have inclination and love, even if his way of being, knowing, and loving is categorically different from ours, and therefore our knowledge of God must always take into account both the likeness and the unlikeness. But, most importantly,

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proper passions as in created minds, yet voluntariness is exercised to an infinitely greater height. The divine love, which is the sum of all the exercises of the divine will, is infinitely stronger, more lively and intense, as not only the light of the sun, but his heat, is immensely greater than that of the planets whose light and heat is derived from him."

Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 65. "Edwards's anthropology has a sort of dialectical convertibility with his psychological model of the Trinity."

[371] So Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103.

[372] Since Edwards is maintaining some kind of distinction (what he will later call a "real" distinction) between understanding and will, there is a distinction between perception (which is an activity of the understanding) and the will's activity in judgment. Put another way, both the understanding and the will are operative in the act of judgment. Thus, the distinction between understanding and will passes right through the act of judgment.

[373] "According to our way of conceiving of God, it is a disposition or inclination of the heart of God. Though it must be observed that there is indeed no difference between habit and act, disposition and exercise in God; no difference between a disposition to love, and the exercise of love." "872. Is. 6:3(a)" in *WJEO* 65. Elsewhere Edwards distinguishes between the principle of the soul and the exertions and exercises of the soul. The dispositional principle of the soul is of a productive nature. This principle produces acts or exertions of the soul, which contain the intention and aim of the agent. See *WJE* 2:421-422.

Edwards has justified accounting for God's happiness in terms of understanding and will, idea and love.

In sum, in these first paragraphs, Edwards establishes that God is infinitely happy. Because he is a person, this means that he knows himself in his perfect idea, and infinitely loves himself. While the Creator-creature distinction chastens our ability to reason from God's image in man to its original, nevertheless, the doctrine of analogy allows us to see a reflection of God's own life in his image-bearers. At the same time, we must never forget that God is infinite and simple, and thus his way of being, knowing, and loving will always transcend our creaturely conceptions.

The next paragraph is an interpolation added some time after the original composition. It was likely inserted here as support for the claim in the final sentence of the previous paragraph: "But the divine perfection [of simplicity] will not infer that his understanding is not by idea, and that is not indeed such a thing as inclination and love in God."[374] The Johannine "God is love" demands that there be more than one person in God, since love is essential to the Deity and love requires both a lover and a beloved. Significantly for the controversy with Clarke, Edwards argues that "God is love" means that God, *by nature*, must have "an eternal *and necessary* object" for his love.

The next paragraph continues to work within Edwards's threefold simplicity. Since there is no distinction in God between perception and reasoning, the sum of the divine understanding simply is his perfect idea of himself. Likewise, the sum of his inclination, love, and joy (which, by virtue of divine simplicity, are not distinct) is his love to and delight in himself. Edwards clarifies that in using "love to" and "delight in," he is not distinguishing between these; they

[374] *WJE* 21:113.

mutually interpret one another because "they are the very same thing in God," adding that they are only "scarcely distinguishable" in men. Whatever differences there are between love and joy are merely modal and circumstantial.

Having established the personhood of the simple God by reasoning from God's image in man to God's own being, understanding, and will (all of which are simple), Edwards now clarifies that while God's understanding is simple, his understanding is not identical in every way to his being. In other words, while there is no distinction in God's understanding between perception and reasoning, there *is* a distinction between God's being and his understanding. That is, God's self-knowledge "must necessarily be conceived to be something distinct from his mere direct existence." This necessity is drawn from the likeness between God and man established earlier in the *Discourse*. While human acts of self-reflection are imperfect (that is, there is some imperfection between the mind and the image generated by self-reflection), in God this is not so. When God beholds and delights in himself, he becomes his own object such that there is a real duplicity in God.

Edwards is seeking to demonstrate that God's activity of having an idea of himself *repeats* the divine nature, without *adding to* the divine nature. The idea of God generated by God's thinking of himself is "a substantial idea and has the very essence of God."[375] To draw in the earlier language, there is no imperfection or "gap" between God and his idea. In doing so, Edwards is arguing that God's "having an idea of himself" is the means of eternal generation.[376]

[375] *WJE* 21:114.

[376] "Edwards maintained that the Father eternally generates the Son as the very image of his glory in order that he might gaze upon the divine glory in beatific delight." Christina Larsen, "Jonathan Edwards and Eternal Generation," in *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 208.

Or, to put it the other way around, eternal generation occurs through God's thinking about himself.[377]

The next few paragraphs clarify and defend Edwards's claim that this is a real duplicity and that God's image "has the very essence of God" and "is truly God." He does so first by insisting that God's idea of himself is perfect, "exactly like him in every respect…in a most absolute perfection of similitude." "To all intents and purposes" God's perfect idea or image of himself is simply God himself because "there is nothing wanting" in the image that isn't in the Deity that generates it. Every divine quality—"substance, life, power, anything else"—is present in God's perfect idea of himself.

The second defense of this perfect likeness that Edwards offers comes from further reflection on the nature of "spiritual ideas" by which Edwards means "ideas of things purely spiritual / immaterial." Ideas of reflection include our ideas of love, fear, and other affections. Edwards argues that our ideas of such affections are truly only repetitions of the actual experience of these affections, but on a dimmer switch. That is, when we think about fear, what we are truly doing is re-experiencing fear only "more fully or faintly." We either think about something that frightens us, or that has frightened us, or draw our attention to something that represents that affection to our minds. The key for Edwards is that "if a person has truly and properly an idea of any act of love, of fear, or anger, or any other act or motion of the mind, things must be so ordered and framed in his mind that he must for that moment have something of a consciousness of the same motions…" In other words, to truly think about fear is to be

[377] For similar arguments, see the relevant sections in Edwards, Ames, and Keckermann. Turretin, admits that explaining the Son's generation by the illustration of a mind's thinking may serve to illustrate the mystery and has some allusive Scriptural support in references to the Son as the *logos*. However, he makes clear that the notion of the mind generating an idea by thinking "cannot set forth a full and accurate determination of the mode of this generation." He urges "sobriety" and eschews attempts to define or search into the incomprehensible mode of generation. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 3.29.30, 302.

afraid; to properly think about love is to experience love. A perfectly clear and full idea of love "will be in all respects the very same act of mind of which it is the idea;" that is, as he said earlier, there will be "an absolute perfection of similitude" between the thing itself (in this case, love or fear) and our idea of that thing.[378]

At this point Edwards makes explicit something that he has assumed throughout this section, namely that, given the absolute likeness between the thing and the idea of the thing, or between God and his idea of himself, the only conceivable difference between them is that the latter represents the former. In other words, with respect to God, one of them is God and the other is the idea generated by his self-reflection. One of them is "pattern" and the other is "representation." One is original and the other is the image.[379]

Edwards now moves to illustrate what he means by the perfection of the reflexive idea by positing a man who has "an absolutely perfect idea of all that passed in his mind" over the last hour. Such a man, if his idea of all that passed in his mind were perfect, would be to all intents and purposes "over again what he was that last hour."

Central to Edwards's argument is Locke's distinction between direct consciousness and reflection.[380] It is the reflex or contemplative idea that generates the duality, not the mere direct

[378] Both Helm and Crisp find fault with Edwards on this point. See Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," 98; Crisp, *God and Creation*, 121-127. In Crisp's words, "I can have an idea of happiness without being happy" (123). On Edwards's terms, you can't, or at least, an idea of happiness that is not also an experiencing of happiness is a very faint idea. The more full and vivid the idea becomes, the more that it becomes an actual instance of happiness. For Edwards's fuller defense of this idealism, see "782. Ideas. Sense of the Heart. Spiritual Knowledge or Conviction. Faith" in *WJE* 18:452–66.

[379] To anticipate the trajectory of Edwards's argument, this distinction between original and image means that the only difference between the Father and Son is found in their relation of origin, here conceived in psychological terms: The Father begets the Son by means of his own self-reflection. On distinguishing the persons based on relations of origin, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q32 a.3.

[380] Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," 93. "For Edwards the godhead is not *like* a Lockean mind, it is a *case* of a Lockean mind, tweaked by the application of the principle of perfection, and modified by the recognition of the pure spirituality of God." Helm's point is accurate insofar as it goes; Edwards is doing more than offering an analogy. However, it would be more accurate to say that many seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers thought of persons as intellectual agents, having both understanding and will, and that Edwards simply

consciousness.[381] Locke held that we derive all of our ideas from experience— either from sensation (which is directed toward external objects) or reflection (which is the soul's perception of its own operations).[382] Thus, there is a distinction between the first operations of the mind, which are directed outward, and the subsequent self-reflective operations by which the mind knows itself. First, the mind thinks about something external (hardness, sweetness, motion, an elephant), and then the mind is able, as it were, to turn itself around and think about its own thinking. In Edwards's appropriation of Locke, he is linking the self-reflective contemplation by which we know our own minds with God and his idea of himself.[383]

This notion of the doubling of the perfectly self-reflective man is surely odd. But perhaps it can be visually illustrated by the experience of looking in a mirror.[384] A man's reflection is the man over again. There is nothing in the reflection that doesn't correspond to the man himself. But the mirror is merely a mirror. What Edwards is asking us to ponder is what would happen if the mirror were "absolutely perfect?" What would be the case if a kind of perfection could be added to our mirror such that our reflection acquired a real existence that was identical to us, but

classifies both humans and God as persons. So Strobel in Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 40n4.

[381] This creates some challenges for Edwards in the strange passage at the end of the *Discourse* in which he seeks to posit something for God to be conscious of directly, prior to the act of self-reflection that generates the Son. See *WJE* 21:142.

[382] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.1.1–5, 104–106. See the discussion in Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," 94–96.

[383] Locke's discussion of the mind is illuminating for Edwards's argument. Locke held that the mind has two fundamental powers or faculties (understanding and will). The exercise of these faculties is most commonly referred to as thinking and willing (or perception and volition). Thus, Locke distinguishes between the faculty itself and its exercise. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.6.2, 128. It is this distinction between faculty and act or exercise that Edwards denies to God by virtue of simplicity.

[384] Ridgeley uses this precise example when explaining uses of the psychological model that he rejects: "as when a man sees his face in a glass, and beholds the image of himself." See Thomas Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism*, ed. John M. Wilson (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 1:159.

with the one and only difference being that it is still possible to distinguish the original from the reflection?

Following the additional hypothesis of the perfectly self-reflective man, Edwards draws together the various threads of this portion of the argument by moving from exploring what is the case with our (creaturely) spiritual ideas to applying this paradigm to God's knowledge. God views, with perfect clearness, fullness, and strength, his own simple essence, and this "viewing" generates an idea of God that is God himself over again. "This representation of the divine nature and essence [in the divine mind] is the divine nature and essence again."[385] In arguing this way, Edwards underscores again that he is explaining *how* God generates the Son. The eternal generation of the Son is "by God's thinking of the Deity." God the Son simply is "the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial, and personal idea which God hath of himself."[386] In saying this, Edwards adamantly reaffirms divine simplicity ("there is no distinction [in the divine essence] of substance and act, but it is wholly substance and wholly act") and insists that God and his idea have, share, and are the same essence. "There is another eternal, almighty, and most holy and the same God." However, this is not a second almighty, but "the same God, the very same divine nature."[387] What's more, since the God who has the idea is a person, and the idea is fully and absolutely God, then God's idea is another person.

At this point, Edwards finally makes explicit what until this point has been implicit. "And this person [generated by God's thinking of the Deity] is the second person of the Trinity, the only begotten and dearly loved Son of God." Edwards's language at this point challenges Clarke

[385] *WJE* 21:116.
[386] *WJE* 21:116.
[387] *WJE* 21:116.

directly. The Son is the "eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial and personal idea which God hath of himself."[388]

Having given a rational account of God's happiness which unfolded in psychological and Trinitarian terms, Edwards then moves to confirm this account by the Scriptures.[389] Scripture confirms Edwards's psychological account of the begetting of the Son in a number of ways. It identifies the Son with the form of God (Phil. 2:6) and the image of God (Col. 1:15). An image of a thing is intended to beget the idea of a thing in others. Thus, "the idea is the most immediate representation, and seems therefore to be a more primary sort of image."[390] Whereas Adam's sons were *in* the image of their father, the Son of God "is not only *in* the image of the Father, but he *is* the image itself in the most proper sense."[391] Additionally, Scripture testifies that the Father loves the Son, which is to say that he is infinitely happy in himself as he sees himself reflected in his idea. Moreover, Christ is called "the face of God" in Scripture (Exodus 33:14), as well as the brightness of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). Scripture expressly reveals that Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the logos of God (John 1:1), and the revealer of God. Edwards summarizes his biblical proofs by saying, "And joining this with what was observed before, I think we may be bold to say that that which is the form, face, and express and perfect image of God, in beholding which God has eternal delight, and is also the wisdom, knowledge, logos and truth of

[388] It is language like this that indicates that Edwards is not merely offering a psychological analogy of the Trinity, but a psychological account of the Trinity. More properly, as I indicated earlier, Edwards is offering a psychological account of God's happiness that is then correlated to traditional Trinitarian doctrine. "Edwards stands against the mainstream of Reformed scholasticism in his speculative amplification of the distinctive personal properties of the Son and the Spirit, and within the tradition of appropriating Augustinian psychological metaphors for the Trinity." Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 7.

[389] *WJE* 21:117.

[390] *WJE* 21:117.

[391] *WJE* 21:117.

God, is God's idea of himself. What other knowledge of God is there that is the form, appearance, and perfect image and representation of God, but God's idea of himself?"[392]

Having shown the agreement between the Scriptures and his psychological account of the Son, Edwards turns to the Holy Spirit. "The Godhead being thus begotten by God's having an idea of himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea, there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and Son."[393] This act of delight is the eternal, perfect, and essential act of the divine nature. The mutual love and joy of the Father and Son "stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit."[394]

Edwards then quickly moves to Scriptural confirmation. God is love, and 1 John 4 appears to treat God dwelling in us, love dwelling in us, and the Spirit dwelling in us as different ways of expressing the same truth. The divine nature not only subsists in love, but "this love is the Spirit." The name "Holy Spirit" links the third Person to the divine nature "subsisting in pure act and perfect energy." The word "spirit" often refers to the "disposition, inclination, or temper of the mind," and since the temper of God's mind is love, and since there is no distinction in God between the temper of love and its exercise, it's fitting that the divine person who is the love of God should be called the Spirit. What's more, God's holiness consists in love to himself, and thus denominating the Spirit as Holy accords well with him being God's love. The Spirit's office as quickening all things, sanctifying the saints, and comforting and delighting them accords well with the Spirit being the love of God. The Scripture represents the Spirit as a dove at Jesus's

[392] *WJE* 21:120.

[393] *WJE* 21:121. In this sentence, Edwards introduces the term "subsistence" for the first time, equating it with the term "person."

[394] *WJE* 21:121.

baptism, in which the Father expresses his love and delight in his Son.[395] Types and metaphors of the Spirit, such as oil, water, fire, breath, wind, etc. accord with the notion that the Spirit is the love of God flowing like water, warming like fire. Scripture teaches that we commune with God by the Holy Spirit, and the absence of the Spirit from many of the salutations and benedictions in the New Testament ("Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ") is owing to the fact that the Spirit *is* the grace and peace of God given to the saints.

Edwards then completes the movement of his argument, showing how an account of God's happiness yields a psychological account of the Trinity.

> And this I suppose to be that blessed Trinity that we read of in the holy Scriptures. The Father is the Deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the Deity in its direct existence. The Son is the Deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of himself, and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the Deity subsisting in act, or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth, in God's infinite love to and delight in himself. And I believe the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and divine love, and that therefore each of them are properly distinct persons.[396]

4.3 Three Innovative Moves

The next five paragraphs impinge directly on the question of Edwards's understanding and affirmation of divine simplicity as well as his attentiveness to the anti-trinitarian controversy. To be specific, in the next five paragraphs Edwards makes a number of innovative theological moves in relation to God's attributes, divine simplicity, and perichoresis.[397] In the interests of

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[395] This argument also appears in "98. Trinity" in *WJE* 13:265.

[396] *WJE* 21:131. Thus, Holmes is incorrect when he claims that "the residue of a 'common' essence which was so pervasive in Western theological discourse is wholly absent." Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory: An Account Of The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards* (T&T Clark, 2000), 69. As we've just seen, the entire *Discourse* is filled with references to the divine essence. God beholds and delights in it. It is fully repeated through God's self-reflection and wholly resides in God's idea of himself. It flows out and is breathed forth in love and delight in himself. And of course, the whole of it truly and distinctly subsists in the divine idea and love, rendering them distinct persons.

[397] In calling these moves "innovative," I am not suggesting that they are unprecedented. In fact, versions of each move are present in various other theologians, both before and after Edwards. However, the deployment of these arguments together as a way of expositing the traditional doctrine of the Trinity is, as far as I know, unique to Edwards.

clarity, I will summarize these theological moves before unpacking them in greater detail. Following the exposition, I will evaluate these moves in light of the broader Reformed background and the contemporary claims of Edwards scholars. First, Edwards reduces all of God's attributes to divine persons. Second, Edwards invokes divine simplicity to preserve God's oneness in the face of the real distinctions between the persons. Third, Edwards appeals to the doctrine of perichoresis in order to preserve the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3.4.1 Innovation 1: Reducing Attributes to Persons

Edwards's innovative moves are introduced as rational confirmation of his psychological account of "the true Trinity."[398] Reason is sufficient to tell us that there are three (and only three) real distinctions in God: "of God (absolutely considered), and the idea of God, and love and delight."[399] Here Edwards distinguishes between God's real attributes, which are "three distinct real things in God," and modal and relational attributes of God. Attributes such as infinity, eternity, and immutability do not pick out really distinct things in God, but instead identify modes of existence. Attributes such as wisdom and omniscience may be reduced to God's idea, as Edwards demonstrated in the earlier confirmatory arguments from Scripture. God's power is simply God's understanding and will in relation to possible effects. God's holiness is identical to his love for himself. Attributes such as goodness, mercy, and grace are "overflowings of God's infinite love." Only God, the idea of God, and the love of God are "really distinct." Even in

[398] The language of "true Trinity" may be a shot at anti-Trinitarians like Clarke who contested the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity by arguing that it was not the true, biblical, and primitive Trinity taught by the apostles and early fathers.

[399] *WJE* 21:131.

created spirits, attributes of extent, duration, being with or without change, the ability to do are only modes and relations.[400] Thus, there are only three distinct real things in God.[401]

In identifying these three distinct things in God, Edwards is effectively reducing all of God's attributes to persons of the Godhead. Or, to be more precise, Edwards reduces all of God's attributes to God, God's idea/knowledge, and God's love/joy, which he then identifies with the Father, Son, and Spirit, respectively.[402]

4.3.2 Innovation 2: Divine Simplicity and the Trinity

The second innovative move that Edwards makes in the *Discourse* is to invoke divine simplicity in order to preserve God's oneness in the face of the real distinctions he has just posited. In keeping with what we saw in his sermons, Edwards expresses divine simplicity in the form of a maxim derived from other orthodox authors: "everything that is in God is God." Variations of this phrase appear in Aquinas, Thomas Ridgley, Johannes Wollebius, John Edwards, Edward Leigh, Samuel Willard, among others.[403] Edwards quotes the maxim and then insists that it can only be applied to real attributes (God, his idea, his love), and not the

[400] Again, Locke is illuminating. Recall that Locke distinguished between the faculty of understanding and the action of thinking, and the faculty of will and the action of willing, a distinction which Edwards denied to God by virtue of simplicity. Thus, the two great and principle actions of the mind are thinking and willing. However, Locke further noted other actions of the mind such as remembering, discerning, reasoning, judging, knowledge, faith, etc, which he describes as "Modes of these simple *Ideas* of Reflection." Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.6.2, 128. Modes do not subsist by themselves, but are dependent on substances (2.12.4, 165). Modes may be simply variations of the same simple idea, or they may be compounded of simple ideas and thus be mixed modes (2.12.5, 165). For Locke's discussion of modes of thinking, see 2.19, 226–229. For his discussion of modes of pleasure, see 2.20, 229–233.

[401] So Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 37–51.

[402] Holmes describes this as a "radical move" in the history of theology. I would suggest that while this taxonomy, which reduces attributes to persons is unique and innovative, given that attribute taxonomies vary widely among classical theologians, it is an overstatement to call it radical. It still falls within the bounds of orthodox Trinitarianism and the tradition of divine simplicity. What's more, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, other theologians nested attributes within each other.

[403] Johannes Wollebius, "Compendium Theologiae Christinae," in *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 18, 33; cf. Walter Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edward's End of Creation," *JETS* 59 (2016): 339–59 on Edwards's supposed denial.

modalities and relations.[404] To apply the simplicity maxim to God's immutability, omnipresence, and authority is nonsensical. But to apply it to his real attributes—his understanding and his love—simply confirms that the psychological account of the Trinity is true. Or, as Edwards puts it, Edwards's psychological account of the Trinity explains *how* the simplicity maxim works. "God's understanding is God" means "the Son is God." "God's love is God" means "the Holy Spirit is God." Scripture itself confirms this, since only *logos* and *agape* are said to *be* God (John 1:1; 1 John 4:8, 16).[405] Thus, having posited three real distinctions in God—God, his idea, his love—Edwards is able to preserve the divine unity by an appeal to divine simplicity as applied to these real attributes.

4.3.3 Innovation 3: Personhood through Perichoresis

The final innovative move Edwards makes is in response to a potential objection to the psychological account of the Trinity. Someone might object that we cannot equate divine love with the Holy Spirit, because love is not a person.[406] In other words, the Holy Spirit (and indeed the Son as well) lacks personality. Edwards defines a person as "that which hath understanding and will." How then can understanding alone have a will, and how can God's will (or love) have understanding? Edwards first notes another aspect of his inherited theological tradition—while there are three persons in God, there are not three understandings (or three wills), but "one and

[404] Thus, whereas earlier in the *Discourse*, Edwards had applied simplicity in a trifold way to God's power, God's understanding, and God's will, here he applies simplicity across these distinctions. In other words, for Edwards, divine simplicity means there is no distinction in God between habit and act, or between the faculty of understanding and the act of perception, or the faculty of the will and the act of love. At the same time, divine simplicity means that, while there is a "real" distinction between God, his understanding, and his will, each of these is still God, since "everything that is in God is God."

[405] Edwards does note that God is said to be light, but he then equates divine light with the divine understanding. Indeed, "Christ is the true light (John 1:9) and…the effulgence of the Father's glory (Heb. 1:3)."

[406] This is precisely the type of argument Clarke made in rejecting the identification of the Son and God's inward Reason or Wisdom.

the same understanding" and a single divine will.[407] He then reiterates that "the whole divine essence is supposed truly and properly to subsist in each of these three—viz. God, and his understanding, and love." He then appeals to the theological concept of perichoresis to resolve the issue.[408] The three persons "are after an ineffable and inconceivable manner one in another; so that one hath another, and they have communion in one another, and are as it were predicable one of another."[409] The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Likewise, the Spirit is in the Son, and the Son is in the Spirit. And the Father is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father. Thus, the Spirit, who is the divine love, has understanding (and is therefore a person) because he is in the Son. The Son, who is the divine understanding, has love (and is therefore a person) because he is in the Spirit.

> All three are persons, for they all have understanding and will. There is understanding and will in the Father, as the Son and the Holy Ghost are in him and proceed from [him]. There is understanding and will in the Son, as he is understanding and as the Holy Ghost is in him and proceeds from him. There is understanding and will in the Holy Ghost, as he is the divine will and as the Son is in him.[410]

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[407] In a footnote to the *Discourse*, the editors include an abortive attempt by Edwards to formulate the same argument as this section which includes the following statement: "The three that are in the Godhead, if they are persons, they doubtless all understand and all love. To this I would say, first, that divines have not been wont to suppose that those three are three distinct minds, but they are all the same mind in three distinct ways of subsisting. Neither have they been wont to suppose that they had three distinct understandings or three distinct wills, but that all three had the same understanding, and the same will, and the same love, and that because they have all the same essence, and the attributes are not distinct from the essence." *WJE* 21:132. In the end, Edwards reaches the same destination by a different route. On the shift in Edwards's argumentation, see Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 40–51.

[408] So Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *JESJ* 4.1 (2014): 31–32. The following statement from Holmes about the reduction of attributes to persons is surely odd: "I suspect that, provided the doctrine of perichoresis is remembered and asserted, a form of this move [reducing attributes to persons] could be developed that would not damage Trinitarian theology in any fundamental way, but Edwards did not live to do this." Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 71. However, immediately after reducing attributes to persons, Edwards makes this precise move in order to preserve the personhood of the Son and Spirit while maintaining the unity of the divine essence. For another instance of this move, see the exposition of Ramsay earlier in this chapter.

[409] *WJE* 21:133. Muller defines perichoresis or the Latin equivalent *circumincessio* as "the ultimate, mutual interrelation of the persons, as appears from John 10:38 and 14:10–13 where the Son states that he is in the Father and the Father in him." Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Triunity of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:185.

Muller, *PRRD*, 4:185. It is an *ad intra* conjunction of the persons, or a mutual inexistence. Turretin calls it "the intimate mutual union of the persons" or "mutual intertwining or inexistence and immanence." See also Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.13, 255.

[410] *WJE* 21:134.

And yet there are not three understandings, but a single divine understanding, namely the Son.[411] Nor are there multiple wills in God, but a single divine will, namely the Holy Spirit. Kyle Strobel has rightly identified this argument as "personhood through perichoresis."[412] The mutual indwelling of the persons of the Godhead allows them to be predicable of each other such that they are each persons, and yet there are not multiple understandings or wills in the single divine essence.

4.4 Evaluation of Edwards's Trinitarianism

The remainder of the *Discourse* includes Edwards's remarks about the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity and the way that his account confirms and illustrates claims traditionally made by orthodox divines, both of which were covered earlier. It also contains additional notes, appended to the main discourse at various times, which Edwards never worked into the argument as a whole. Thus, while there is value in attending to these additional notes, we may at this point turn our attention to evaluating Edwards's argument in light of the criticisms from chapter 1.

What then do we make of Edwards's innovations? Do they, as some modern scholars argue, mark a departure from the Reformed tradition of divine simplicity?

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[411] Strobel notes that this way of preserving the single divine understanding and will is different from the Augustinian way that Edwards adopts in Miscellany 308. See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 40–45. In both the *Discourse* and in Misc. 308, Edwards aims to preserve the single divine understanding and single divine will, but adopts different strategies. Thus, Crisp is partly right and partly mistaken when he says, "[Edwards] is, in effect, reconceiving the Augustinian heritage of the doctrine of the Trinity by means of the doctrine of perichoresis so as to retain the Augustinian notion of a single divine understanding and will but reallocating these to the divine persons rather than retaining them within the divine essence." Crisp is right about Edwards's reconception; Edwards arrives at the same Augustinian destination by a different (perichoretic) route. But he is wrong when he says that Edwards's allocation of the divine understanding and will to the divine persons is in opposition to retaining them in the divine essence. Edwards is clear that "the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and the divine love," and this subsistence in the divine essence is what renders God's idea and love "properly distinct persons." *WJE* 21:131.

[412] Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 28.

4.4.1 Real Distinctions?

To begin, what can we say about Edwards's language of "real distinctions" in God? Do they, as Crisp suggest, "pull in the direction of a real differentiation in the divine nature that his commitment to the pure act account of divine simplicity denies"?[413] From Aquinas on, the tendency among the orthodox is to deny real distinctions in God, as though there were multiple things (*res*) in God. However, this denial of real distinctions is made with respect to the essence of God, or, in speaking of God under the absolute aspect. When speaking according to the relative aspect, that is with respect to the persons of the Godhead, we may speak of real distinctions.[414] Thus, given that Edwards is speaking of the real distinctions between the persons by means of a psychological account of the Trinity, his use of the term "real" is perfectly consistent with the orthodox tradition. He is effectively positing what Turretin calls a "real minor distinction," which "exists between a thing and the mode of the thing or between the modes themselves, which coincides with the modal distinction held by others."[415] The term "modal" here is used in its trinitarian sense to distinguish the modes of subsistence, not in the circumstantial or relative sense that Edwards adopts in the *Discourse*. Or, to say it clearly, what Edwards calls a real distinction, Turretin calls a modal, or real minor, or personal distinction.[416]

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[413] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 7.

[414] So Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," 102.

[415] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.11, 279. This is also why, contra Crisp, Edwards is not "guilty of 'reasoning into existence' a second divine being, not merely a second divine person of the Trinity." Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards's God: Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 90n21. The idea of God generated by his self-reflection is not a separate being, distinct from God, but is, in classical terms, only modally distinct from God; that is, God, and his idea (and his love, for that matter) are simply distinct modes of subsistence of the single divine essence, a point which Edwards explicitly makes. See *WJE* 21:131.

[416] So Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 43. This is why Crisp's objection to Edwards ("If God is truly simple, then there can be no real metaphysical distinctions in the divine nature between one essential characteristic and another" in Crisp, *God and Creation*, 137.) doesn't work. Edwardsian real attributes are not "real metaphysical distinctions" between essential characteristics. Rather they are real personal distinctions between one mode or manner of subsisting and another. Oddly, Crisp appears to recognize this elsewhere when he writes, "[Edwards's] nomenclature is not quite the same as the representatives of Puritan and Reformed orthodoxy we have considered, to be sure. But though he allows 'real' distinctions in the Godhead, it is clear from what he says in the 'Discourse on

What Edwards calls a mere modal or relative distinction aligns with the formal, virtual, eminent, or rational distinction with a foundation in the thing that other theologians put forward. In fact, the last category appears to closely approximate Edwards's understanding of the diverse modal attributes, with the notable difference that, whereas the tradition left the divine foundation of the rational distinction unanalyzed, Edwards identifies the foundation in God of the rational distinction by correlating the question of attribute distinctions with that of personal distinctions.[417]

4.4.2 Divine Triplicity?

What then of Edwards's statements that the psychological account yields a triplicity in God? Plantinga-Pauw takes this as a clear rejection of the traditional doctrine of simplicity. Turretin, after all, insists that, while simplicity and Trinity are compatible, "simplicity and triplicity are so mutually opposed that they cannot subsist at the same time."[418] Likewise Edward Leigh distinguishes Trinity from triplicity. "Trinity is when the same Essence hath divers wayes of subsisting; and Triplicity is when one thing is compounded of three parts."[419] So also "Keckermann warns us against a confusion between triplicity and trinity. 'Strictly that which is composed of three things is triple(x), which it is blasphemous even to think concerning God;—that which in a single nature has three modes of existence is triune; the modes plainly do not imply composition.'"[420] On this, it is clear that, when Edwards wrote Miscellany 94, he either

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the Trinity' that these real distinctions are very like the sort of internal differentiation of divine persons that the Reformed orthodox, countenanced." Crisp, *God and Creation*, 113.

[417] On these relative attributes, see Part 2 of this project.

[418] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.9, 193. See the discussion in Muller, *PRRD*, 3:283.

[419] Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity Consisting of Ten Books* (London: A.M., 1654), 205, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A47625.0001.001.

[420] Heinrick Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thomas (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 110.

was unaware of the sharp distinction posited by other orthodox divines, or he chose to ignore this linguistic convention. However, there is no hint that he embraced composition in God. Thus, his (single) use of the term "triplicity" in an unpublished miscellany does not testify to a departure from the simplicity tradition, but merely a semantic difference in his use of terms.

4.4.3 Rejecting Divine Simplicity?

What about Edwards's treatment of "the maxim amongst divines?" Did he, as Plantinga Pauw argues, reject the simplicity maxim? Or did he, as McClymond suggests, minimize it and confess that strong versions of simplicity were unintelligible? I submit that neither argument make sense of the relevant passage. Contrary to Plantinga Pauw, this is not a rejection of divine simplicity but an explicit embrace of it. Like Aquinas and the Reformed scholastics, he fully believes that "everything that is in God is God." Moreover, contrary to McClymond, the modification that Edwards is making is not in relation to simplicity per se, but in relation to the definition and categorization of God's attributes. In other words, he wholly accepts the "maxim amongst divines" and then applies it to his (unique) taxonomy of divine attributes by which all of God's attributes may be reduced to persons of the Trinity.[421] For Edwards, "the immutability of God is God" is nonsensical, not because simplicity itself is nonsensical or requires modification, but because immutability is merely a modal attribute of God, and simplicity properly applies only to the real attributes of God. This would mean that, for Edwards, saying "The mercy of God is God" is not technically wrong, but it is imprecise. Mercy is an overflowing or manifestation of God's love. Thus, it would be more proper to first reduce God's mercy to his love (God's mercy is God's love in relation to pitiable sinners), and then apply the simplicity maxim.

[421] So Helm, "The Human Self and the Divine Trinity," 104.

In relation to the wider theological tradition, Muller is clear that taxonomies of attributes vary among the Reformed orthodox, as did the types of distinctions permitted in discussions of attributes.[422] Thus, Edwards's real-relative distinction, while innovative, is fully within the classical tradition of divine simplicity. In fact, as we've seen, there is precedent in the tradition for using divine simplicity in conjunction with a psychological account of the Trinity. The Anglican John Edwards begins with his own version of the simplicity maxim ("there are, they say, no accidents in God") before describing the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit in psychological terms as the internal acts of the divine essence. What's more, like Edwards, he notes that these internal acts of self-reflection and love are "really distinct," and therefore three persons. Likewise Thomas Stackhouse moves from the simplicity of God as an "eternal Mind, free from the mixture of all kind of matter" to the substantial, subsisting internal Word that is distinct but not divided from the eternal Mind from whence it proceeds. In both cases, the simplicity maxim preserves the unity of the divine essence, even as the psychological analogy furnishes distinctions (even real distinctions) within God.

4.4.4 The Simplicity / Excellency Dilemma?

What then of the relationship between divine simplicity and divine excellency? Is there really a dilemma? I submit that there is not, provided we pay careful attention to Edwards's language of excellency.

> One alone, without any reference to any more, cannot be excellent; for in such case there can be no manner of relation no way, and therefore, no such thing as consent. Indeed, what we call "one" may be excellent, because of a consent of parts, or some consent of those in that being that are distinguished into a plurality some way or other. But in a being that is absolutely without any plurality there cannot be excellency, for there can be no such thing as consent or agreement.[423]

[422] See Muller, *PRRD*, 3:136, 216; Also Adriaan Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht: Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety*, vol. 35 of *Brill's Series in Church History* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 219.

[423] *WJE* 6:337.

The precision of this statement is important and demonstrates Edwards's commitment to divine simplicity. In allowing that entities that we call "one" may be excellent, he provides two alternatives for preserving excellency (indicated by the word "or") . The first is by a consent of parts, and would apply to all compounded unities that nevertheless have some type of relation allowing for consent and agreement. The second is the "consent of those in that being that are distinguished into a plurality some way or other." This distinction "some way or other" creates space for a non-composite relation that displays the consent necessary for excellency. In other words, Edwards makes sure to preserve a way for God, who is simple and devoid of parts, to be excellent because of the real distinctions between the persons of the Godhead.

We may confirm the compatibility of excellency and simplicity by the way that Edwards expounds the former in his notes on "The Mind." There he argues that God's excellence "consists in the love of himself."

> For he was as excellent before he created the universe as he is now. But if the excellence of spirits consists in their disposition and action, God could be excellent no other way at that time, for all the exertions of himself were towards himself. But he exerts himself towards himself no other way than in infinitely loving and delighting in himself, in the mutual love of the Father and the Son. This makes the third, the personal Holy Spirit or the holiness of God, which is his infinite beauty, and this is God's infinite consent to being in general. And his love to the creature is his excellence, or the communication of himself, his complacency in them, according as they partake of more or less of excellence and beauty; that is, of holiness, which consists in love; that is, according as he communicates more or less of his Holy Spirit.[424]

The Holy Spirit *is* the excellency of God, the beauty of God, God's infinite consent to being in general. And, if we needed further confirmation, the *Discourse* itself references this type

[424] *WJE* 6:364. He further confirms it a few paragraphs later when he writes, "'Tis peculiar to God that he has beauty within himself, consisting in being's consenting with his own being, or the love of himself in his own Holy Spirit; whereas the excellence of others is in loving others, in loving God, and in the communications of his Spirit" (365).

of argument when Edwards confirms his psychological account of the Trinity by highlighting the name of the Holy Spirit. Why is it fitting that the Spirit have the denomination holy?

> 'Tis in God's infinite love to himself that his holiness consists. As all creature holiness is to be resolved into love, as the Scripture teaches us, so doth the holiness of God himself consist in infinite love to himself. God's holiness is the infinite beauty and excellency of his nature. And God's excellency consists in his love to himself, as we have observed in ["The Mind"].[425]

The simplicity-excellency dilemma is no dilemma at all. Excellency demands that God be "irreducibly plural."[426] Simplicity demands that he be "indivisibly one." And so he is. He is both simple and excellent. He is one God and three persons. In fact, he is simply excellent.

4.4.5 A Priori Argument for the Trinity?

What of Edwards's "failed" attempt at an a priori argument for the Trinity?[427] First, Edwards's argument isn't an a priori deduction. He begins with commonly accepted axioms (God is infinitely happy; God is a person; God is simple pure act) and reasons from them to particular conclusions. But these axioms are not necessarily taken from reason apart from revelation.[428] Moreover, he repeatedly confirms his argument with Scripture. Indeed, he is only

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[425] *WJE* 21:123.

[426] At one point, Crisp says that maximal excellency demands "an *essential* and *irreducible* plurality." Crisp, *God and Creation*, 95. However, Edwards nowhere says that excellency demands an "essential plurality." The same applies to Crisp's contention that "God cannot be both metaphysically simple (i.e. A being without any parts) and also excellent (i.e. A being possessing the internal differentiation necessary for 'consent' and, therefore with the plurality necessary for the Godhead)" (101). In response, the internal differentiation necessary for consent is not a differentiation of parts, but a differentiation of persons. In Turretin's language, it is not a distinction between thing and thing, but between a thing and the mode of the thing. If there is a simplicity-excellency dilemma in Edwards, it is one that he shares with the entire Christian tradition, from Augustine through the Reformed orthodox.

[427] For this claim, see Crisp, "Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," 84. "Edwards's attempt at an a priori Trinity, although motivated by a pious desire to understand something of the biblical doctrine, is extremely problematic" (86).

[428] On the relationship between reason and revelation, see Miscellany 1340. Weinandy writes, "He wanted, in his discourse, to demonstrate that such a revealed understanding of God is not inimical to reason and so undeserving of faith. Edwards therefore wished to provide a philosophical basis for such belief. In doing so, he did not intend to prove rationally, by means of philosophy, that God is a trinity of persons, but rather, through philosophical enquiry, to provide, by way of analogy, a rational basis for what the Church has traditionally believed and proclaimed." Weinandy, "Discourse on the Trinity," 68. So also McClymond, who notes that Miscellany 94, which Holmes cites in support of the a priori thesis, refers to that "which necessarily results from the putting

able to salvage the personhood of the persons through the doctrine of perichoresis, which is not known a priori but only through revelation.[429]

Crisp's charge that Edwards engages in a sleight of hand in individuating the persons is owing to a fundamental confusion about what Edwards claims in the first paragraphs of the *Discourse*.[430] Regarding these paragraphs, Crisp writes, "What Edwards says is that God takes infinite delight in himself *and* God takes infinite delight *in his perfect idea of himself*. On the face of it, this seems very peculiar, perhaps even contradictory."[431] But Crisp has clearly misunderstood Edwards. Edwards does not *coordinate* these two sentences, as though they are two distinct notions. Instead, the second statement *expounds* the first. God's delight in himself is explained as "God takes infinite delight in his perfect idea of himself." Infinite self-delight *means* infinite delight in his perfect idea of himself.[432] Or take Crisp's attempt to make the problem clear.

> On the one hand, he asserts that God's infinite self-delight and the idea God has of this infinite self-delight are, contrary what we would normally think, one and the same thing. Both are divine. On the other, he says that, despite this, Scripture teaches that God's infinite delight is in his Son, who is a distinct person in the Godhead.[433]

[together] of reason and Scripture." Michael J. McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony: A Critique of Some Critics of Sang Lee's and Amy Pauw's Accounts of Jonathan Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 75–76.

[429] Part of Crisp's problem is that he views (what he calls) the a priori argument in the first pages of the Discourse and the real distinctions arguments later in the discourse as two distinct strategies for individuating the divine persons. See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 12, 117. But they are not two different strategies; they are two different stages in one argument, the first being the argument proper, and the second being a rational confirmation of the argument using divine simplicity.

[430] Crisp's argumentation at this point is incredibly confusing, owing, as I suspect, to an initial confusion about what Edwards is doing in the first few paragraphs.

[431] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 121.

[432] Crisp repeatedly confuses Edwards's claim that "God has infinite delight in his perfect idea of himself" (which is simply an expansion of the simpler statement that God infinitely delights in himself) with the notion that God has "an idea of [his] infinite self-delight." Or again, he equates the perfect idea of God, generated by God's self-reflection (otherwise known as the Son) with "the divine idea of infinite self-glorification." See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 122. But neither of these equations belong to Edwards. Indeed, the second concept in each of the previous sentences is foreign to Edwards's thought.

[433] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 121-122.

There are two central confusions in this passage. First, Edwards nowhere equates God's infinite delight with his idea of infinite delight. In fact, Edwards never uses the notion of the idea of God's infinite self-delight at all. Rather, he speaks of God's infinite delight *in* his idea. Second, God does not delight in the Son *despite* his infinite delight in his idea of himself, but *because* of his infinite delight in his idea, because the Son *is* God's perfect idea of himself. To recapitulate the argument: God infinitely delights in himself. This means, 1) that he has a perfect idea of himself and 2) that he delights in that idea. We must distinguish between God and his idea, because the entire account we are giving of God's love for himself is built on an analogical correspondence between God and his image in man, allowing for the appropriate differences between God and man due to divine infinitude and divine simplicity. And since we distinguish between a man, and the man's idea of himself produced by self-reflection, so also must we distinguish between the same in God. But since God's idea of himself is perfect, lacking nothing, it is a repetition or generation of the divine nature again, and it is this idea of God generated by his self-reflection that Edwards identifies with the Son, and then confirms from Scripture. Or again "God's delight in God" is equivalent to "God's delight in his own perfect idea of God" which is further equivalent to "God's delight in his Son."

Crisp further claimed that Edwards's argument entails the infinite iterability of ideas in the divine mind, and thus infinite persons in the Godhead. This is because, if God's self-reflection generates a perfect idea of himself (with nothing lacking), then what happens if this perfect idea also self-reflects? Won't there now be a perfect idea of the perfect idea of God? And so on, *ad infinitum*?[434] Edwards is mindful of this argument (though Crisp does not mention his response).

[434] Crisp applies the same reasoning to the Holy Spirit as God's self-delight. See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 123–26.

> It may be objected, that at this rate one may prove an infinite number of persons in the Godhead, for each person has an idea of the other persons. Thus, the Father may have an idea of his Son; but you will argue that his idea must be substantial. I answer, that the Son himself is the Father's idea, himself; and if he has an idea of this Idea, 'tis yet the same Idea: a perfect idea of an idea is the same idea still, to all intents and purposes. Thus, when I have a perfect idea of my idea of an equilateral triangle, it is an idea of the same equilateral triangle, to all intents and purposes. So if you say, that God the Father or Son may have an idea of their own delight in each other; but I say, a perfect idea or perception of one's own perfect delight cannot be different, at least in God, from the delight itself. You'll say, the Son has an idea of the Father; I answer, the Son himself is the idea of the Father. And if you say, he has an idea of the Father; his idea is still an idea of the Father, and therefore the same with the Son. And if you say, the Holy Spirit has an idea of the Father; I answer, the Holy Ghost is himself the delight and joyfulness of the Father in that idea, and of the idea in the Father: 'tis still the idea of the Father. So that, if we turn it all the ways in the world, we shall never be able to make more than these three: God, the idea of God, and delight in God.[435]

According to Edwards, God's idea of his idea is no different from his original idea. A perfect idea of God's delight is no different than God's original delight, since a perfect idea of a thing is simply an instance of that thing. Thus, Edwards's idealism prevents the kind of infinite iterability that Crisp proposes.[436]

4.4.6 Losing the Divine Essence?

What then of the purported loss of the divine essence, owing to the reduction of attributes to persons? As a quick perusal of the *Discourse* shows, references to the divine essence abound in Edwards's argument. Most significantly, as the climax of Edwards's initial argument, he claims that "the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and

[435] *WJE* 13:261–62.

[436] An additional line of response comes from Thomas Aquinas, who also addressed the objection to infinite processions flowing from a psychological analogy in *Summa Theologia*, q27.a3.1. "Aquinas interpreted the two processions (i.e., the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit) as acts of understanding and will or processions of the Word and of Love, respectively. Given, moreover, that God is a being of an "intellectual nature," there can be only two basic acts—one of intellect or understanding, the other of will—and there cannot be any further multiplication of acts, given that "the procession which is accomplished within the agent in an intellectual nature terminates in the procession of the will." See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:45. God's perfect fecundity means that "there can be no further processions, given that the two kinds of procession, intellect and will, are completely fulfilled in the ad intra procession of "one perfect Word, and one perfect Love." Muller, *PRRD*, 4:4. This response perfectly accords with Edwards's axiomatic definition of person as "that which hath understanding and will."

divine love," rendering them distinct persons.[437] Thus, Edwards has not abandoned the tradition of the divine essence.

Nor has he left it "underdeveloped" as Crisp argues. Crisp fears that by reducing attributes to persons, Edwards cannot unequivocally affirm that God's attributes are really identical with the divine essence. "For the attributes that distinguish the divine persons are not identical with the divine essence. If they were, there would be no means by which to individuate the divine persons."[438] But this is a confusion of Edwards's claim. Edwards clearly affirms that the attributes that distinguish the divine persons (understanding and will, or idea and love) *are* identical with the divine essence. That's precisely how he deploys the simplicity maxim: "Everything that is in God (i.e. God's real attributes, namely God, his idea, and his love) is God (i.e. the divine essence)."[439] What Crisp should say is that the attributes that distinguish the divine persons are not identical *with each other*. But this is just as we'd expect, because the Edwardsian real distinction is equivalent to the scholastic modal distinction by which the persons are individuated. God's idea is really distinct from God, understood as God "in his direct existence." Or to put it in the terms of Reformed orthodoxy, the Son is modally distinct from the Father. Again, to use categories from Reformed scholasticism as expressed by Duby, under the

[437] *WJE* 21:131

[438] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 115.

[439] A likely source for Edwards's account of modal and relative attributes in relation to divine simplicity may be found in the work of Adrian Heereboord. Heereboord (as mediated through the translation of Charles Morton) speaks of three "structural moments" in relation to God's decrees. "These are not temporal moments, but instead conceptual instants that allows us "to distinguish God's free determination of decrees and the actual futurition of the decrees, without compromising the doctrine of God's simplicity." See Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 216. The first conceives of the act of decreeing "as a vital act of God, who is living substance," and thus the decree is ordered to God himself and is indeed simply God himself decreeing. In the second structural moment, we conceive of the decree as "terminated upon the decreed state of affairs." Heereboord says that this transcendent relation between God decreeing and the state of affairs decreed is an exemption to the simplicity maxim by which "everything in God is God" (Heereboord uses the negative form of the simplicity maxim: "there is nothing in God which is not God himself"). Significantly, Heereboord identifies formal *relations* and *modes* of being, of existing, and of operating as examples of things which are in God in some sense, but which are not God. Like Edwards, he claims that the simplicity maxim applies to "real entity" (*ens reale*), but *not* to these modes and relations.

absolute aspect, God, his idea, and his love are identical. Everything that is in God is God, which must be understood of real attributes. But, under the relative aspect, God, his idea, and his love are *not* identical, because the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished by their personal and incommunicable properties.[440] Thus, while Edwards does not speak in the full grammar of the medieval and Reformed scholastics (owing likely to his polemical purposes in relation to anti-trinitarians like Clarke), his thought is consistent with and can be expounded by this grammar.

Staying with the possibility of expounding Edwards in scholastic categories, it is not true, as Crisp claims, that Edwards distinguishes the persons by more than their relations of origin.[441] Edwards, according to Crisp, redistributes many divine attributes to the divine persons, so that these attributes now provide *additional* ways to distinguish the persons. But this misunderstands Edwards's taxonomy. Edwards does reduce attributes to God, his idea, and his love (or some combination), but these modal and/or relative attributes do not properly distinguish God from his idea and love. God is distinguished from the idea of God solely by the fact that one of them is the original and the other is the image generated by God's self-reflection.[442] God is distinguished from his love for himself by the fact that God's love arises from the mutual delight between God and his idea. In other words, in Edwardsian terms, relations of origin is precisely how the distinct faculties/acts of God are distinguished. The Father is unoriginated. The Son is generated by

[440] Turretin writes that the persons are constituted and distinguished by "personal properties as incommunicable modes of subsisting." The Belgic Confession says, "we believe in one only God who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really (*réellement*), and in truth (*à la vérité*), and eternally distinguished (*éternellement distinguées*) according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:82.

Muller summarizes the Reformed orthodox understanding of "person" thusly: "A divine person, then, can be identified as "an incommunicable subsistence of the divine essence," granting that the divine essence is possessed in common by the three persons, while the persons represent incommunicable characteristics: Father, Son, and Spirit are God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son not the Spirit, and so forth." See Muller, *PRRD*, 4:177–84.

[441] Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 31. "In the final analysis, it appears that he cannot unequivocally endorse the Augustinian maxim that 'in God all is one where there is no opposition of relations'—that is, relations of origin." See also Crisp, *God and Creation*, 137.

[442] *WJE* 21:114.

God's understanding. The Spirt proceeds from Father and Son as they infinitely delight in each other. Thus, God, his idea, and his love *are* distinguished by their relations of origin, and nothing else.[443] Edwards's modal and relative attributes do not add other ways of distinguishing the persons; instead they are simply the ways that we speak of God's real attributes in relation to created reality.[444]

What about the claim that Edwards's reduction of attributes jeopardizes the principle of inseparable operations? Crisp writes, "Edwards seems unable to avoid the impression that certain divine attributes conventionally thought to belong to the divine essence, such as wisdom or knowledge, are the peculiar preserve of one or another divine person rather than shared together in the divine life."[445] The difficulty comes in the final phrase "rather than shared together in the divine life." Edwards does reduce attributes like wisdom and knowledge to God's idea which he equates with the Son, but these attributes are in fact shared together in the divine life, because the Son is in the Father and the Spirit. Perichoresis prevents the isolation or division of the divine attributes which Crisp fears. As Edwards says, because of divine simplicity and perichoresis, "the whole divine essence is supposed truly and properly to subsist in each of these three—viz. God, and his understanding, and love." Thus, for Edwards perichoresis and simplicity preserve inseparable operations *ad extra*.[446]

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[443] Larsen concurs in her discussion of Miscellany 1062: "Edwards is quite concerned to safeguard the Son's equal glory and divinity with the Father at the level of natural, unwilled processions, so he finds that the only difference between them is the merely logical priority of the Father as the person who generates the Son for eternity. There is a clear insistence that any other difference—or even a misunderstanding of this difference!—would be catastrophic for the equal glory of the Son." Larsen, "Eternal Generation," 214.

[444] On this, see Part 2

[445] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 135–36.

[446] So Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 135–36. A similar confusion appears when Crisp claims that the divine understanding and the divine will "are not attributes of the one divine essence. They are divine persons." Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 32. But this is a false dichotomy. The divine understanding and divine will (or the divine knowledge and the divine love) are *both* attributes of the one divine essence, really distinct from it (in the real minor sense) *and* they are distinct divine persons, by virtue of perichoretic indwelling. Crisp dichotomizes what Edwards is at pains to keep together.

4.4.7 Perichoretic Personhood?

How should we evaluate Edwards's strategy for preserving the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through perichoresis? First, it is worth noting that Edwards's definition of person differs from the main options utilized among the medieval and Reformed scholastics. He adopts neither the Boethian definition ("a person is an individual substance of a rational nature") nor the Victorine ("a divine person is an incommunicable existence of a divine nature.")[447] Nor does he utilize Turretin's definition of a hypostasis as "an intellectual *suppositum*" or the two-fold definition of person that Turretin derives from Calvin and Melanchton: a person is 1) "a subsistence in the essence of God by which (related to others) he is distinguished by an incommunicable property" and 2) "the individual that subsists, is living, intelligent, is not sustained by another, nor is a part of another."[448]

Instead, Edwards's simple definition of a person as "that which hath understanding and will" bears remarkable resemblances to that employed by Clarke. At the same time, Edwards is not the only Reformed divine to use such a definition. Edward Leigh defined a person as "one entire, distinct subsistence, having life, understanding, will and power, by which he is in continual operation."[449] Thomas Ridgeley, after noting that classical definitions of "person" often perplex people with difficult words, offers a definition almost identical to Edwards. "We never

[447] On the medieval debates over the definition of person, see Muller, *PRRD*, 4:25–59. The Boethian definition, while popular in the Middle Ages, posed significant problems for trinitarian theology. According to Muller, the difficulty arises from a problem of translation between Latin and Greek. In the patristic era, the Greek terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* were both rendered as *substantia* in Latin. Over time, the Greek terms were "gradually differentiated in Latin into *substantia* and *subsistentia*, with the former referring to the single divine essence and the latter to the three subsistences or persons. Much of the difficulty with the Boethian definition arises when its use of *substantia* is understood as rendering *ousia* rather than hypostasis—whereas Boethius used *essentia* as equivalent to *ousia* and specifically understood *substantia* as rendering *hypostasis.*" Muller, *PRRD*, 4:33n45. If "individual substance" is [mistakenly] understood to mean a unique entity essentially distinct from others, then how can there be three persons in God without also implying three distinct essences?

[448] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.23.7–8, 255.

[449] Muller, *PRRD*, 4:179. Wendelin's definition is similar: "an individual subsistence, living, intelligent, incommunicable, not sustained by another, not part of another."

call any thing a person that is not endowed with understanding and will[450]…We always suppose a person to have an understanding and will."[451] Significantly, Ridgeley, like Edwards, treats this understanding of person almost as a commonplace. At the very least, he expects little resistance to his definition.

Second, we must be clear about how Edwards deploys perichoresis. Sang Hyun Lee has argued that Edwards relies upon perichoresis to preserve the unity of God instead of the traditional appeal to the singularity of the divine substance. But this is mistaken. For Edwards, perichoresis does not preserve divine *unity*; divine simplicity preserves divine unity. Perichoresis instead preserves divine *personhood*, affirming that each of the divine faculties/acts are themselves divine persons by virtue of the mutual indwelling and wonderful union of God, his understanding, and his will.[452]

Third, as to "the metaphysical heavy lifting" that perichoresis accomplishes, Edwards appeals directly to Scripture and to the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity. Thus, our inability to fathom *how* perichoresis works is not a defect.[453] It is precisely what we would expect, given the mystery of the Godhead. And it is precisely why Edwards appeals directly to Scripture to support it.[454]

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[450] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:151.

[451] Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:151.

[452] So Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 35; also Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 53. Strobel calls this "personhood through perichoresis." Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 28.

[453] It is worth noting that Crisp's exposition of Edwards's use of perichoresis is misleading when he posits that the persons become "components" or "parts" of the others. See Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," 40–41. Edwards conceives of the faculties/acts, or real attributes, as distinct "manners of subsistence," not parts. Thus, for the Spirit to rely upon the Son for understanding (and therefore personhood) does not make the Son a part of the Holy Spirit.

[454] This is further evidence that Edwards has biblicist anti-trinitarians in view. Given their insistence on the plain meaning of Scripture, they would be in no position to object to Edwards's appeal to perichoresis, as it is derived from John 10, 14, and 17.

4.5 Summary

By way of summary, it will be useful to identify and recapitulate the major elements of Edwards's argument. He begins from three fundamental axioms which he shares with all who style themselves Christians, whether orthodox trinitarians, subordinationists, or deists.

1) God is infinitely happy in himself.
2) God is a person—he has understanding and will.
3) God is simple, pure act—everything that is in God is God.

From these shared assumptions, Edwards articulates a psychological account of the Trinity, utilizing Lockean faculty psychology and idealism. Most of Edwards's account is rationally discerned (given his assumptions) and biblically confirmed. However, a full and orthodox account of the Trinity requires what we might call a "rescue" axiom derived directly from Scripture.

4) The persons of the Godhead ineffably mutually indwell each other such that they are predicable of one another.

This biblically derived axiom preserves the personhood of each person of the Godhead in the face of the difficulty of identifying the faculties of the divine mind with the Son and the Spirit. The result is that God is both simple and excellent in his triunity.

In other words, there are three fundamental elements to Edwards's account of the Trinity. First, Edwards *distinguishes* the persons using a psychological account of the Trinity, rooted in divine happiness. Second, he maintains the *unity* of the Godhead by virtue of divine simplicity, whereby everything (real) in God is God. Third, he maintains the *personhood* of each person through mutual indwelling or perichoresis. Distinguish by the psychological account. Maintain unity by divine simplicity. Maintain personhood through perichoresis. These are the essential elements of Edwards's Trinitarianism.

Edwards is thus able to claim that there is one simple God, three co-equal persons (intelligent agents), and yet a single divine understanding and a single divine will. Moreover, the three persons are rightly understood as subsistences of the single divine essence which are distinguished solely by relations of origin. He is able to demonstrate this from both Scripture and reason, using clear definitions and careful and limited deductions. In this, he stands fully within the Reformed and classical tradition of Trinitarianism.[455] At the same time, by eschewing scholastic definitions and the full range of scholastic distinctions, Edwards is able to respond to the antitrinitarians of his day, using assumptions and definitions acceptable to men like Clarke. Thus, Edwards is able to offer an account of the Trinity and God's attributes that is faithful to the Bible, agreeable to reason, consonant with the orthodox tradition, effective at overthrowing anti-Trinitarianism, and thereby honoring to the simple and triune God.

[455] "Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity and doctrine of God can be broadly categorized as belonging to the Reformed scholastic tradition." Steve Studebaker, "Jonathan Edwards's Social Augustinian Trinitarianism: An Alternative to a Recent Trend," *SJT* 56.3 (2003): 152–53.

Tan concurs, drawing on medieval theologians such as Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, as well as Reformed orthodox theologians such as Leigh, Turretin, and Mastricht, to exposit Edwards's trinitarianism in scholastic terms. However, Tan seems to read too much scholasticism into Edwards, finding more precise distinctions than is warranted. Rather Edwards's trinitarianism is a simplified scholasticism that is consonant with fundamental conclusions of Reformed orthodoxy, without adopting the full range of scholastic distinctions. See Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned*, 5–50.

PART 2 ATTRIBUTE CLASSIFICATION AND THE GOD-WORLD RELATION

CHAPTER 5 ATTRIBUTE CLASSIFICATION AMONG THE REFORMED SCHOLASTICS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter will explore Edwards's taxonomy or classification of attributes in light of the Reformed orthodox tradition. In chapter 1, we noted the variety of attribute taxonomies present among the Reformed orthodox. While Reformed theologians disagreed strongly with each other on the classification systems, and even criticized alternative patterns, such debates did not become rancorous.[456] Muller identifies a number of classification systems among the Reformed scholastics that are relevant for understanding Edwards. Attributes may be categorized as absolute or relative. They may be distributed according to the ways of knowing God, either the *via negativa* or the *via eminentiae* (and sometimes the *via causalitatis*). They may be distinguished into communicable or incommunicable attributes. Finally, they may be divided into attributes of essence, intellect, and will.[457] Before turning to Edwards's adoption and modification of these classification systems, it will be necessary to first briefly describe them, as well as to see them employed in the work of Ames and Turretin.

5.2 Absolute and Relative Attributes

The absolute-relative distinction between attributes shows up frequently among the Reformed orthodox. Given its importance for understanding Edwards, it is worth exploring in some detail. Muller notes that this distinction is similar to the sufficiency-efficiency classification, as well as attributes of the first order versus attributes of the second order. The

[456] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:216.

[457] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:216.

basic distinction has to do with God as he is in himself apart from any relation to anything outside himself, and God as he relates to his creation.[458]

> Reformed scholastics employ the distinction between absolute and relative divine attributes, those which describe God's being under some aspect from eternity as well as with respect to creatures and those which describe God's being under some aspect only with respect to creatures. The former are really identical to God's essence considered *in se* and absolutely, while the latter are really identical to God's essence considered *pro nobis* and relatively in respect of various creaturely circumstances.[459]

Before exploring this distinction, we must clear up a confusion regarding use of the terms "absolute" and "relative." These terms may be used in two decidedly different ways in theology proper. The first is with reference to the essence-persons distinction in God. As we noted in chapter 1, we may consider God under an absolute aspect, attending to the singularity and simplicity of the divine essence. Additionally, we must also examine the triune God under a relative aspect, given the distinctions among the divine persons. Here relative or relation refers to the persons in relation to one another within the one God, as they are distinguished by their peculiar characteristics. In this use of the terms, both "absolute" and "relative" pertain to God *as he is in himself*.[460]

On the other hand, the same terms may be employed to signify a distinction between God in himself and God in relation to creation. Here we are speaking of absolute and relative *attributes*, as opposed to considering God in himself under an absolute *aspect* and a relative *aspect*. In this second use of the terms, absolute attributes include the entire *ad intra* life of God, or God apart from any relation to creation or to possible creation. Thus, both examination of

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[458] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:216–217.

[459] Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation: Dogmatic Responses to Some Analytic Questions," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6.2 (2012): 126.

[460] See Johannes Wollebius, "Compendium Theologiae Christinae," in *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 14. "God is a Spirit, existent eternally in himself; one in essence, three in persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God is known in himself and in his works. In himself, he is known absolutely in his essence, relatively in the persons."

God's essence *and* examination of the personal relations within God are contained within the absolute aspect in this sense, since the simplicity of his essence and the trinity of his persons are true of God in himself. Relative attributes, on the other hand, approach God in his relations *ad extra*, or God *pro nobis.*

The use of the same terms to explore two different distinctions in God and his relations can be confusing. This is especially so in exploring the thought of Jonathan Edwards, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, sought to coordinate attribute distinctions with personal distinctions by reducing attributes to persons. The bulk of the next chapters will focus on the absolute-relative distinction in the second sense—God as he is in himself (including both the simplicity of essence and trinity of persons) and God as he relates to his creation.

Duby argues that beneath the absolute-relative distinction when speaking of attributes lies a "Thomistic exposition of the God-world relation and its bearing on our understanding of divine names such as Creator, Lord, and so on." Aquinas posits three types of relation: logical, real, and mixed. In logical or ideal relations, the two poles of the relation are not mutually determined by each other. In real relations, such as the relation between father and son, "both extremes are really related or really mutually determined by one another." In mixed relations, one extreme is logically related to the other, while the second extreme is really related to the first. Whereas relations between the persons of the Godhead are real relations, the relation between God and the world is only a mixed relation: creation is really constituted by its relation to God, but God is not really constituted by his relation to creation. God is who and what he is apart from creation.[461]

[461] In order to ward off the misunderstanding that denying a real relation between God and the world means that God is aloof from creation, Duby helpfully cites Polanus to the effect that while God is not "really" (in the technical Thomistic sense) related to creation, he is truly and actually creator and redeemer. Duby, "Contingency," 127.

A clear example of absolute and relative attributes is found in Anselm's *Monologion*. In speaking of what we may predicate of God (i.e. the supreme nature), Anselm distinguishes between what we may say substantively and what we may say relatively.

> No relative term applies in respect of substance to that of which it is said in respect of relation…Something said, therefore, of the supreme nature in respect of relation does not signify its substance. Hence the mere fact that the supreme nature is greater than everything that it has created clearly does not specify its natural essence. For it is called 'greater' and 'supreme' in relation to other things, and, if they did not exist, it would not be intelligibly thought to be 'supreme' or 'greater than'. (But it would not be any less good, nor would its essential greatness be liable to any subtraction. This is because it is good and great through itself— not through something other than itself.) 'Supreme' therefore does not directly signify that essence which is, without qualification, greater and better than everything else. (Think of the nature that is, of all natures, the supreme. Now take away its being supreme. It is, nevertheless, still no greater and no less than it was.) And what goes for 'supreme' goes similarly for terms that are similarly relative.[462]

The term "supremacy" implies that there is something to which God can be compared, something that he is "greater than." Thus, supremacy and other comparative terms are only predicated relatively of God, whereas, according to Anselm, terms like good and great may be predicated of him substantively (or absolutely), since they specify his natural essence.[463]

Muller notes that some variation of the absolute-relative taxonomy is preferred by Owen and the Anglican John Edwards. In his refutation of the Socinian John Biddle, Owen uses the absolute-relative distinction to clarify the nature of God's omnipresence.

> The properties of God are either absolute or relative. The absolute properties of God are such as may be considered without the supposition of any thing else whatever, towards which their energy and efficacy should be exerted. His relative are such as, in their egress and exercise, respect some things in the creatures, though they naturally and eternally reside in God.[464]

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[462] St. Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26–27.

[463] Duby, writing of the Reformed orthodox account of such things, writes, "Because God's assumption of a relation to the creature is entirely free, names such as Creator, Lord, and so on are not ascribed to God necessarily." See Duby, "Contingency," 127. In other words, while God is truly Creator, he is not necessarily Creator.

[464] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1966), 12:93.

God's immensity or infinitude is an absolute property whereby he is unbounded and without limit. God's ubiquity—his presence to all things and persons—"is a relative property of God; for to say that God is present in and to all things supposes those things to be."[465] God's ubiquity depends for its meaning on the existence of things and persons to be present *to*. In fact, Owen goes so far as to say that "the ubiquity of God is the habitude of his immensity to the creation."[466] In other words, ubiquity is what we call God's immensity or infinitude as it is brought in relation to creation.

In his *Theologia Reformata* the Anglican John Edwards embraces a version of the absolute-relative distinction under the terms "primary attributes" and "secondary attributes," after rejecting the negative-positive classification and the communicable-incommunicable classification as untenable.[467] Primary attributes, such as existence, life, simplicity, spirituality, infinity (including both ubiquity and eternity) are the "root and basis of the rest." Secondary attributes, such as knowledge, power, and holiness, are built upon the primary, or they are built upon each other, as mercifulness, justice, and faithfulness are contained within God's holiness.

5.3 Other Patterns of Classification

Turning to the other classification systems, Muller notes that, generally speaking, the Reformed orthodox followed the older medieval tradition in positing three ways to approach how we know God: the *via causalitatis*, the *via eminentiae*, and the *via negativa*.[468] The first ("way of

[465] Owen, *Works*, 12:93.
[466] Owen, *Works*, 12:93.
[467] John Edwards, *Theologia Reformata* (London: Lawrence, Wyat & Robinson, 1713), 44.
[468] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:166. Edward Leigh is representative. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity,* Book 2 (London: Griffin, 1646), 2. Thomas Ridgeley links the *via eminentiae* with God's communicable attributes, and the *via negativa* with God's incommunicable attributes. The former give us perfections which are eminently in God and can be ascribed to him once they have been abstracted and scrubbed of every imperfection, so that at best, there is "some faint resemblance of which we find in intelligent creatures." The latter are those that have no likeness in creatures and thus "rather represent him as contrasted by them." See Thomas Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein*

causation") refers to the way that we ascend from secondary causes and effects up to the first cause. The second ("way of eminence") refers to the way that all creaturely perfections are possessed by God eminently; that is, God possesses such perfections chiefly and in a more excellent way than his creatures. The final ("way of negation") refers to the fact that we know God in knowing what he is not. That is, we know him when we deny that he possesses creaturely imperfections such as finitude, limits, composition, and so forth. The result is that we are left with both positive and negative attributes. Positive attributes include his goodness, mercy, love, knowledge, power, while his negative attributes include infinitude, eternality, immutability, simplicity, and the like.[469]

While the division of attributes into communicable and incommunicable is often regarded as standard, many of the Reformed orthodox rejected the division on the grounds that, properly speaking, all of God's attributes are incommunicable. The Anglican John Edwards reflects this point of view when he finds this distinction untenable because such attributes inhere in God essentially, originally, radically, eminently, superlatively, fully, and infinitely, and therefore they cannot be properly communicated to us. The attributes as they are in men are "shadows and resemblances of the like perfections in God."[470] God's infinitude means that this way of distinguishing attributes is "ill-framed."[471]

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the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism, ed. John M. Wilson (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 1:80.

[469] Muller notes that some Reformed scholastics linked the three approaches to God to other classification system. "Thus, the *via eminentiae* gathers the 'positive attributes' of God, the *via negativa* the 'negative attributes,' and the *via causalitatis* the 'relative attributes' that indicate the way in which God relates to his creatures." Muller, *PRRD*, 3:166.

[470] Edwards, *Theologia Reformata*, 44.

[471] See also Muller, *PRRD*, 3:224. The Anglican Edwards also challenges the negative-positive distinction on the grounds that even the negative attributes (such as immutability and infinitude) contain a positive excellence. Edwards, *Theologia Reformata*, 44.

Nevertheless, other theologians adopted this classification of attributes with appropriate qualifications. Attributes are communicable only in a limited and improper manner.[472] There is no formal or essential communication of God's intrinsic properties, but only a likeness or analogy between God and his effects on and in the creature. In other words, attributes are communicable analogically speaking.[473] Muller notes that the *imago Dei* provided a helpful parallel for understanding communicable attributes. "Human beings, as created good, reflect in their being some of the attributes of the divine being, but without being essentially equal to God or, in the strictest sense, partakers of the divine being."[474] Incommunicable attributes, on the other hand, "recall the *via negativa,*" in that such attributes represent the difference or opposition between God and the creature, reminding us of the vast distance between us and God.[475]

The division of attributes into those of essence, intellect, and will is built on the fairly standard faculty psychology handed down from the Middle Ages. This classification is often related to the absolute-relative distinction, in that attributes of the essence are regarded in some sense as absolute, and the attributes of intellect and will flow from the divine life in its operations. Muller links this division to Reformed theologians with Cartesian sympathies such as Burman and Stapfer.[476] Muller's discussion makes it clear that Reformed theologians felt considerable freedom in combining various patterns of classification.

5.4 William Ames

In order to better grasp how these classification systems affected the exposition of God's attributes, it will be useful to examine two theologians in detail. We begin with Ames. Ames

[472] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:223.

[473] Wollebius is a representative example. "Some [divine] properties are not communicable to creatures: others are communicable in analogical effects." Wollebius, "Reformed Dogmatics," 38.

[474] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:225.

[475] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:225–226.

[476] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:221–222.

adopts the absolute-relative distinction using the terms sufficiency and efficiency.[477] God's sufficiency refers to God as he is in himself, apart from any relation to creation, and pertains to both his essence and his subsistence, to the one God and the three persons. God's efficiency is his working power "by which he works all things in all things."[478] Nevertheless, God's essence and subsistence are reflected in his efficiency. God's efficiency as it pertains to the divine essence is called omnipotence. God's efficiency as it pertains to the subsistence of God shines forth through inseparable operations and the respective missions of the divine persons. We'll take each of these in turn.

Ames highlights a number of features of God's omnipotence. First, there is a proper order when conceiving of God's power. First, there is God's "simple power," which Ames identifies with God's sufficiency, and ought to be considered prior to God's knowledge and will.[479] But God's power pertaining to the exercise of God's efficiency ought to be considered *after* God's knowledge and will. Thus, the proper order for conceiving these things is: simple power, then knowledge, then will, and then efficient power. God's efficient power is no different from God's effectual will, except that we distinguish them in our thinking. Put another way, "the omnipotence of God in action is nothing else than the effecting will of God."[480]

Second, Ames repeatedly emphasizes divine simplicity and God's pure actuality in his consideration of God's efficiency and relation to his external works. God's acting or working is simply God in action, which is nothing other than God himself. Speaking of God's acting or

[477] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 4.8, 84. Muller links the absolute-relative distinction and the sufficiency-efficiency distinction, citing Edward Leigh. Muller, *PRRD*, 3:216.

[478] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.1, 91.

[479] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.6, 92.

[480] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.9, 92.

working or efficiency simply adds "God's particular relation to the real effect."[481] Or again, in speaking of God's active power, we say that he has an ability to communicate something to others, that he has the potency of a cause. However, "properly speaking, in respect of himself, active power does not apply to God, for it [active power] implies that he was at first idle and after moved himself into act. God is rather most pure act."[482] In other words, we must be careful in ascribing active power to God, lest we introduce change and potency to him. Ames accomplishes this by distinguishing "proper speech" from "practical speech," and by maintaining the absolute-relative distinction. It's "in respect of himself" that active power does not apply to God. However, active power does apply to God "in respect to the creature who is rightly said to be able to receive and experience" God's act.[483] Thus, in himself God has no active power, since that would imply that he has potency and thus is not pure act. However, creatures do have potency, and thus in relation to them, we may speak of God's active power.

Finally, Ames, following the medieval scholastics, makes a distinction in God's omnipotence between God's absolute power and God's ordaining or actual power. God's absolute power is "that by which God is able to do all things possible although they may never be done."[484] It is his power in the broadest sense, covering both what God does and what he could or can do (though it does not extend to things that involve a contradiction and thus are altogether impossible). God's ordaining power refers to not only what he *can* do, but refers to that by which he "does actually do what he wills."[485]

[481] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.2, 91.
[482] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.13, 92.
[483] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.15, 93.
[484] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.19, 93.
[485] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.20, 93.

Turning to God's efficiency as it reveals the subsistences of God, Ames affirms inseparable operations, "for all external actions are common to all the persons."[486] In this respect, there is no pre-eminence of dignity in the external actions, since each person works "by himself" and evinces "the greater unity and identity in one and the same cause." As a result, each person is due equal honor. Nevertheless, Ames also affirms that "the distinct manner of working consists in each person working according to the particular form of his subsistence."[487] In other words, the external *missions* of the persons follow the internal *processions* of the persons. In terms of the order of working, the Father works from himself through the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son works from the Father through the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit works from the Father and the Son through himself. Accordingly, each person has a work in which their manner of working "shines forth most clearly," and thus, that work is chiefly attributed to that person: "creation is attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit."[488]

Ames next turns to consider "the exercise of God's efficiency," progressing from God's decree, then to creation, and then to providence. God's decree is "his firm decision by which he performs all things through his almighty power according to his counsel."[489] God's decrees are eternal and involve counsel. Ames likens God's counsel to a "deliberation over the best manner of accomplishing anything already approved by the understanding and the will."[490] In other words, God's understanding and will have already approved some end, and God's counsel is brought in to determine the best manner or means of accomplishing that end. Ames is clear that

[486] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.22, 93.
[487] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.26, 93.
[488] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 6.31, 94.
[489] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.1, 94.
[490] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.9, 95.

the notion of "deliberation" in God is somewhat misleading; God does not make inquiries as men do, but "sees and wills all things and everything at once."[491]

Ames brings together three elements in his discussion of God's counsel: a purpose, a mental conception, and the intention or agreement of the will.[492] The purpose or end of God's counsel is his own glory. The mental conception is like an artist's blueprint for his work; it is the idea which he keeps in mind "as the exemplary cause of all things to be done."[493] In God's case, this blueprint or idea of all things is the divine essence, understood by God as imitable by his creatures. God's use of this blueprint is an inversion of human artistry; whereas men attain knowledge by analysis from things themselves and thus the things themselves are the pattern of our knowledge, in God it is reversed. The divine knowledge is the pattern for the things themselves, and God does not know by analysis, but by genesis. "All things are first in his mind before they are in themselves."[494] Additionally, Ames insists that the divine idea is singular, but becomes manifold as it relates differently to creatures.[495] When these many ideas are considered prior to God's will, they are only abstractions which represent "a possible existence." Thus, the divine ideas in this sense establish the domain of intrinsic possibility. When considered after the

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[491] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.10, 95.

[492] Muller notes that, on the issue of divine ideas, Ames "had a noticeable influence both on his sometime colleague Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) and on later Reformed thinkers, notably on that vast cataloguer of Reformed orthodoxy, Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706)." See Richard A. Muller, "Calvinistic Thomas Revisited: William Ames (1576–1633) and the Divine Ideas," in *From Rome to Zurich, between Ignatius and Vermigli*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 184 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 107. Muller regards Ames as representative of a "modified Thomism, the product of an eclectic Reformed reception of older theological tradition" (118). Fisk likewise notes that Adrian Heereboord, with whose writings Edwards was familiar, regarded Ames's account of divine ideas as authoritative. See Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 173.

[493] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.13, 95. Muller writes, "The divine ideas [are] the conceptual content of the eternal counsel of God as it is directed toward achievement of the ultimate end appointed by God, and therefore the conceptual foundation in God for his divine decree, indeed as integral to the identification of the decree as utterly free." Muller, "Divine Ideas," 110.

[494] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.15, 95. Muller summarizes, "Even so, an 'Idea' in the mind of a human being is 'initially impressed, and afterward expressed,' whereas in God the Idea, strictly or properly, is only 'expressed,' not 'impressed,' inasmuch as the divine Ideas do not arise from anything outside of God." Muller, "Divine Ideas," 112.

[495] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.19, 96.

determination of the divine will, the ideas represent "things which are to come in their actual existence."[496] The consideration of the divine ideas on either side of God's will yields a distinction between God's knowledge of simple understanding and his knowledge of vision. This distinction in knowledge parallels the distinction in power between God's absolute power and his ordained power.[497] "The knowledge of simple understanding refers to all possible things," which God knows "by his all-sufficiency."[498] "The knowledge of vision is the knowledge of all future things," which God knows "by his efficiency or the decree of his own will."[499] Thus, prior to God's decree, we may speak of God's absolute power and his knowledge of simple understanding; he knows and can do all possible things, even those things which he will not do. After his decree, we may speak of his ordained power and his knowledge of vision; he determines to do what he actually will do, and thus knows some things as future actual things.[500] "In each set of distinctions, the will of God intervenes between the terms of the distinction."[501] The will of God moves things from being merely intrinsically and extrinsically possible to being actually determined and intended, and thus the divine ideas become exemplars of actual things following the determination of the divine will.[502]

After rejecting middle knowledge as inconsistent with God's perfection and noting the various forms of God's knowledge, Ames turns to the third element of God's counsel, namely

[496] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.23, 96.

[497] Muller argues that "Ames relates possibility not only to the divine essence but also to the divine power." Possibles are "known to God as ideas in his essence as intrinsically possible," that is, as non-contradictory. Possibles are also "known to God in his power as extrinsically possible," and there is "an agreement between what is intrinsically possible and what is extrinsically possible." See Muller, "Divine Ideas," 116.

[498] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.25, 96.

[499] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.26, 96.

[500] Muller argues that Ames articulates the intellectualist strain of this distinction found in Thomas, as opposed to the voluntaristic strain of this distinction held by Scotus. See Muller, "Divine Ideas," 113.

[501] Muller, "Divine Ideas," 116.

[502] For further discussion of Ames and divine ideas, especially in relation to Adrian Heereboord, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 167–89.

his will or good pleasure. God's good pleasure "is an act of the divine will freely and effectively determining all things."[503] God's will with respect to his creation is "truly free" since it wills "not by necessity of nature but by counsel." As Muller says, "there is…an intellective judgment that logically precedes the will."[504] God's freedom with respect to his inward acts (e.g. the internal processions) attends or is concomitant with those acts and proceeds by a natural necessity. However, with respect to outward acts, God's freedom precedes such acts in principle; "there is no necessary connection between the divine nature and such [external] acts."[505]

In speaking of God's decree, Ames is clear that God truly and simply wills "all things together and at once in only one act." The divine will, however, is unlike the divine power and divine knowledge. "Knowledge knows all things that are to be known and power can do all possible things—together they are stretched forth beyond those things which actually have been, are, and shall be."[506] In other words, God's omniscience and omnipotence extend beyond what God actually does to include what God could do, but doesn't. However, with respect to God's will, there is no distinction that corresponds to the absolute vs. ordained power distinction or the knowledge of simple understanding vs. knowledge of vision distinction. God does not will all that can be willed; "therefore we say that God is omniscient and omnipotent but it cannot be said that he is omnivolent."[507] God does not do all do-ables. Finally, for our purposes, Ames makes clear that while all things that God wills are certain, he does not urge "all things with hard

[503] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.32, 97.
[504] Muller, "Divine Ideas," 116.
[505] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.36, 97.
[506] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.47, 99.
[507] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.47, 99. So also Muller, "Divine knowledge or *scientia* knows all knowables. Divine power or *potentia* references and can accomplish all possibles, including those that are beyond everything that was, is, and will be; but the divine will or *voluntas* does not will all possibles, but only those that God determines are suitable to be willed and ultimately actualized. God, therefore is omniscient and omnipotent, but not omnivolent." Muller, "Divine Ideas," 114.

necessity." Instead, God's will is the "prime root and efficient cause of all contingency and freedom in things."[508]

5.5 Francis Turretin

As we saw in chapter 1, Turretin may be counted among those who adopt a qualified version of the communicable-incommunicable distinction.[509]Additionally, in his exploration of divine simplicity, Turretin puts forward the absolute-relative distinction. God's essence in itself is "absolute and implies no relation to creatures." Yet, when considered with relative opposition to creatures and as the vital principle of production of creatures, the divine essence has "a certain reference and relation to creatures."[510] As Turretin discusses subsequent attributes, we see the way that relative attributes are frequently nested within absolute attributes. For example, in treating of the infinity of God, Turretin argues for an absolute infinity by which God is "free from all limit in imperfection." This absolute infinity may be considered under various aspects: as to essence, it is his incomprehensibility; as to duration, it is his eternity; as to circumscription, it is his immensity. With respect to the latter, Turretin, like Owen, distinguishes between immensity as an absolute and eternal attribute, and God's omnipresence which is his "habitude to place existing in time."[511] God's absolute immensity is the foundation of his relative omnipresence.

Turretin makes a similar move with respect to eternity, which is the infinity of God in reference to duration. True eternity "excludes succession…and ought to be conceived as a

[508] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 7.50, 99.

[509] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 3.6, 190.

[510] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.13, 193.

[511] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.9.22, 201.

standing, but not a flowing, now."[512] Citing the scholastic definition, Turretin claims that eternity is God's "interminable possession of life—complete, perfect, and at once."[513] However, this true and indivisible eternity "embraces all divisible times" in a manner similar to the way his immensity embraces all places, so that "wherever [and perhaps whenever] he is, he is wholly." In each case, as Muller notes, Turretin appears to want to preserve a distinction between divine infinity "intrinsically considered" and divine infinity "extrinsically considered."[514] The aim is to guard the fact that God transcends the created order in a positive sense, not merely a negative one; that is, that the concept of intrinsic infinity "qualifies and guards the concept of extrinsic infinity."[515]

There is a similar nesting of relative attributes when Turretin treats God's justice. God's justice absolutely considered is simply "the rectitude and perfection of the divine nature." Considered relatively with respect to its exercise through the divine will in creation, it includes both his "Lordly justice" by which he rules and governs his creatures, as well as his justice in judgments, by which he rewards and punishes.[516] So also with God's goodness, which includes his absolute goodness and perfection, but also his relative beneficence toward creatures.[517] The latter further flows forth into love for the creature according to the diversity of the objects: love of the creature, love of man, and love of the elect. God's love is further distinguished into grace, which is God's communication of himself to the creature "from gratuitous love without any

[512] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.10.5, 203. Turretin roots the denial of succession in divine immutability and simplicity. Eternity is really identified with the divine essence, which admits of no composition or change of former into latter, of past into present, of present into future.

[513] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.10.6, 203.The Latin phrase Turretin uses is *"interminabilem vitae totam simul et perfectam possessionem*."

[514] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:328. For a full discussion of the Reformed orthodox views of eternity, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:345–362.

[515] Muller, *PRRD*, 3:329.

[516] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.19.3, 235.

[517] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.20.2, 241.

merit in the creature and notwithstanding any demerit" and mercy, which is exercised toward "man as miserable."[518]

When it comes to God's acts, Turretin makes a threefold distinction. First there are immanent and intrinsic acts which have no respect to anything outside of God. These include begetting and spiration which occur with an absolute necessity of nature. Second, there are extrinsic and transient acts which come *from* God, but are not *in* God. These include creation and providence. Finally, there are the immanent and intrinsic acts of God which have a respect and relation to something outside of God. These are God's decrees, which are "the counsels of God concerning future things out of himself."[519] As with Ames, the decrees provide a helpful lens through which to view God's power, knowledge, and will. God's decrees are eternal, even if their objects are created in and with time. Thus, creatures are not eternal; prior to their creation, they lack "real being." Instead, they possess merely known and intended being, on account of God's decree.[520] The decrees are singular in God, but are manifold with respect to our way of conceiving, such that we must conceive of them in terms of priority and posteriority.[521] There are three elements to a decree: a principle, a tendency or relation, and an object. The principle of the decree is simply God decreeing or willing, and thus considered in this way, the decree simply is God himself. The tendency of the decree is "the external respect and habitude toward the creature." The object of the decree is the thing decreed itself, and thus considered in this manner, the decree must be conceived as many and various on the part of the objects.[522]

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[518] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.20.7-10, 242–243.
[519] Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.1.4, 311.
[520] Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.2.10, 315.
[521] Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.2.6.
[522] God's decrees are "in him essentially, as immanent acts of his will with a relation and termination outside of him." Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.1.7, 312. See the discussion in Duby, "Contingency," 133–35. For a similar account in the work of Adrian Heereboord, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 212–15.

God's power is "nothing other than the divine essence itself productive outwardly."[523] Turretin distinguishes between God's actual and ordinate power, "according to which God actually and irresistibly does whatsoever he wills to do," and God's absolute power, "through which he is conceived as able to do more than he really does."[524] The object of God's power is the possible, which Turretin defines as "whatever is not repugnant to be done." This repugnance may be moral or logical. Thus, God cannot lie, because it is morally repugnant to his nature, and God cannot do that which is inherently contradictory, since contradictions involve an eternal disjunction and opposition. Neither of these is a defect in God's power, but is instead a defect in the proposed object.[525]

Just as God's power extends to the possible, so his omniscience extends to the knowable (which similarly excludes logical contradictions).[526] While the knowledge of God is one and simple intrinsically, it can be considered in different ways with respect to its objects. Like Ames, Turretin distinguishes God's knowledge into knowledge of simple intelligence (or natural and indefinite knowledge) and knowledge of vision (or free and definite knowledge).[527] These differ in three ways: (1) in object because the natural knowledge is occupied with possible things, but the free about future things; (2) in foundation because the natural is founded on the omnipotence of God, but the free depends upon his will and decree by which things pass from a state of

[523] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1, 244.
[524] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.21.3, 245.
[525] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.21.11-12, 246–247.
[526] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.21.6, 245.
[527] God's natural knowledge is "the very divine essence itself…understood by God himself…as imitable by creatures" (and thus merely possible). God's free knowledge is the same divine essence "understood by God…to be imitated" (and thus as future intended and actual creatures). Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.1.8, 312. God's natural knowledge is indefinite "because nothing on either hand is determined concerning them by God." God's free knowledge is definite "because future things are determined by the sure will of God." Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.13.1, 212–213.

As with Ames, Turretin makes clear that, whereas "in man, the idea is first impressed on the mind and afterwards expressed in things. In God, it is only expressed properly, not impressed because it does not come from without. In man, the things themselves are the exemplar and our knowledge is the image; but in God the divine knowledge is the exemplar and the things themselves the image or expressed likeness." Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9, 312.

possibility to a state of futurition; (3) in order because the natural precedes the decree, but the free follows it because it beholds things future; now they are not future except by the decree.[528]

As with Ames, it is the will of God that makes the distinction between absolute and ordained power, and between God's natural and free knowledge. Turretin's discussion of the will turns on the question of whether God wills some things necessarily and others freely. Before answering, he establishes three distinctions—one within necessity, one within freedom, and one within the objects of the will.[529] In terms of necessity, Turretin distinguishes hypothetical necessity, which is not necessary of itself, but only on the positing of some hypothesis, and absolute necessity, which cannot be otherwise in any sense. In the former, if God decrees that Jacob be saved, then Jacob will necessarily be saved. However, this is only necessary on the supposition of God's decree. Absolute necessity includes the necessity of God's justice and goodness.[530] God's freedom encompasses both the liberty of spontaneity, by which God is free from external compulsion, and the liberty of indifference, by which God has the power of contrary choice.[531] With respect to the objects willed, Turretin distinguishes the principal object or ultimate end, and the secondary object, which is a means to that end.[532] With those distinctions on the table, Turretin makes the following claims:

1) God wills himself and his own glory as an ultimate end with an absolute necessity.
2) God wills creation freely, with a hypothetical necessity, and with both liberty of spontaneity and liberty of indifference.

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[528] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.13.1, 213. "The foreknowledge of God follows the decree" and is therefore is infallible, since God's decree is immutable (3.12.15, 210).

[529] For a detailed discussion of Turretin's account of necessity, see Paul Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Contingency and Necessity," in *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity, and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N. S. Lane*, ed. Jon Balserak and Richard Snoddy (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 163–78.

[530] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.2, 218–219.

[531] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.3, 219.

[532] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.4, 219.

Turretin writes, "Although God wills all things on account of his goodness and wills his goodness necessarily, yet it does not follow that he wills by the same necessity all other things which he wills out of himself."[533] In other words, God wills goodness with absolute necessity. All other things are willed *because of* his goodness, but the other things are not willed by the same absolute necessity. Instead, he wills these additional things (e.g. creation) "not to increase, but to diffuse his goodness," with the result that he does not need creation. Turretin draws upon the distinction between God's knowledge and God's will to make this clear.

> As therefore all things as they are in God have a certain necessity, but in themselves contingency; therefore whatever God knows, he knows from necessity; but not equally whatever he wills does he will from necessity.[534]

Duby helpfully draws together Turretin's understanding of the absolute and relative distinction, the decrees of God, and the question of freedom and necessity.

> Taken absolutely and as to the internal act and principle, the decrees are necessary since God cannot be God without intelligence and will. But taken relatively and objectively, they are free since "there could be no external object necessarily terminating to the divine will, for God stands in need of nothing outside of himself." "They are necessary, therefore, as to internal existence, but free as to external relation (*schēsin*) and habit." Again, though the divine *volitio* is eternal, it is necessary only "originally on the part of the principle and free terminatively and on the part of the object."[535]

The result is that, for Turretin, created things are entirely contingent; God "could do without them."[536] Though considered absolutely and internally, God's decree is eternal and necessary, with respect to creation itself, "the nature of God was in itself indifferent to decreeing this or that thing." Indifference here, as Duby notes, "should not be taken to indicate that God does not care for creation. It means only that he does not need to posit creation or to forego

[533] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.9, 220.
[534] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.10, 220.
[535] Duby, "Contingency," 134.
[536] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.5, 219. "All creatures are contingent with respect to God because he might not have created any had he so willed" (208).

creation."[537] As Turretin puts it, God "might (if he had willed) have abstained from any production of things."[538] What's more, creation brings about no change in God. No new perfection is added to him, since creation is an act *from* God, but not *in* him. While there is a new external work, there is no new act of the will, since this work "proceeds from his eternal efficacious and omnipotent will," which is the same as God's decree, and, considered internally and absolutely, is simply God himself decreeing and willing.[539]

5.6 Summary

We may summarize the foregoing discussion of attribute classification systems under the following heads.

1) Reformed theologians adopted a number of distinct classification systems. For our purposes, the most noteworthy are the absolute-relative taxonomy, the *via causalitatis, via eminentiae,* and *via negativa*, the communicable-incommunicable taxonomy, and essence-intellect-will taxonomy. These classifications systems may overlap and be combined in a variety of ways.

2) As a result of these classification systems, we may put forward a logical distinction, according to our way of conceiving, between God in himself (absolute) and God in relation to creation (relative). We may further subdivide the latter between God in relation to possible creations, and God in relation to his intended and actual creation (as a result of his decree).

3) The distinction between absolute attributes and relative attributes means that certain attributes are nested within others. In other words, relative attributes are reducible to absolute attributes. Omnipresence is a habitude of infinity to space, just as eternity is a habitude of infinity

[537] Duby, "Contingency," 131n63.
[538] Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.2.13, 316.
[539] Turretin, *Institutes*, 5.1.12, 433.

to time. Grace, mercy, and faithfulness are nested within God's more general and absolute goodness. Both lordly justice and retributive justice are nested within God's rectitude.[540] Thus the absolute-relative distinction preserves God's aseity, simplicity, and immutability.[541]

4) There is a common pattern of distinctions as applied to God's power, knowledge, and will based on God's decree to create the world. That pattern of distinctions is reflected in the following chart.[542]

	Absolute	Relative
Power	Omnipotence / Absolute Power	Ordained Power
Knowledge	Omniscience / Knowledge of Simple Intelligence (Ames) / Natural Knowledge (Turretin) / Ideas of Possible Things	Knowledge of Vision (Ames) / Free Knowledge (Turretin) / Exemplars of Actual Things
Will	Natural and Necessary Will by which God wills his own glory as ultimate end	Voluntary and Spontaneous Will by which he wills creation freely with the liberty of indifference

[540] Duby helpfully comments. "the absolute righteousness or justice of God is not educed or converted to punitive justice by human sin. Rather, justice is absolutely and eternally in God and in God's habitude toward the creature, when the creature commits sin and lacks the pardoning grace of God, the creature meets the justice of God as punitive justice. Human persons change and do not thereby change God but rather suffer the unchangeable nature of God and the egression thereof according to their new deportment before God. So it is with the mercy of God. The love of God is not educed or converted to mercy. Rather, love is absolutely and eternally in God and in God's habitude toward human persons, when human persons are found in a miserable and pitiable state, they experience the immutable love of God and the efffusion thereof pertinently and according to their posture before God. Here the situation of the creature does not cause a new perfection in God or absolutely necessitate a new action from God, but, if God should act in love toward the miserable, the situation of the creature serves as the condition according to which the love of God impinges on the creature." Duby, "Contingency," 127–28.

[541] "Thus, the absolute-relative distinction in the divine attributes steers between necessity and accession, between, on the one hand, attributes like Creator and Lord being identical with God's essence considered absolutely and hence being necessarily in God and, on the other hand, such attributes being indicative of change and accidents in God." Duby, "Contingency," 129.

[542] For a similar account of the twofold knowledge of God in the work of Adrian Heereboord, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 195–98.

CHAPTER 6 ATTRIBUTE CLASSIFICATION IN JONATHAN EDWARDS

6.1 Introduction

In light of this background, we are now in a position to explore Edwards's taxonomy of attributes. While Edwards does affirm a distinction between communicable and incommunicable attributes, his primary categorization orients around two distinctions: between natural and moral attributes, and between real and relative attributes. Additionally, relative attributes may be further divided into sufficiency or capacity attributes on the one hand, and negative attributes on the other.

6.2 Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes

Early in his life, Edwards does speak of the communicable and incommunicable distinction. In Miscellany 81, he writes, "What kind of powers are they, besides his own incommunicable attributes, that God cannot create a finite being with?"[543] Eternity, infinity, and infinite power are "inimitable and incommunicable attributes," unlike holiness, which is a conformity to God's will.[544] Later, in responding to an objection to his claim in *Religious Affections* that God communicates himself to the soul of the saint in his own proper nature, Edwards denies that he means that God communicates his essence to the creature. For Edwards, "nature" is a broader and more varied word, and God's proper nature is his holiness, which is "that in his nature which he communicates something of to the saints, and therefore is called by divines in general a communicable attribute; and the saints are made partakers of his holiness, as the Scripture expressly declares (Heb. 12:10), and that without imparting to them his essence."[545]

[543] *WJE* 13:248.
[544] *WJE* 10:472.
[545] *WJE* 16:203.

However, while Edwards recognized the distinction, he does not make it a central organizing principle for his view of God's excellencies and perfections.

6.3 Natural and Moral Attributes

In *Religious Affections*, Edwards adopts a more robust and comprehensive taxonomy of divine attributes, dividing them into moral attributes and natural attributes.[546] In context, he is attempting to demonstrate that genuine religious affections are "primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things."[547] To do so, he must explain what he means by "moral excellency." He first appropriates the common distinction between moral good and evil and natural good and evil.[548] Natural good includes things like pleasure, honor, strength, speculative knowledge, and human learning.[549] Natural evil includes suffering, pain, torment, and defects of nature (such as birth defects or blindness).[550] These sorts of evil carry no inherent moral judgment. On the other hand, moral evil is "the evil of sin, or that evil which is against duty, and contrary to what is right and ought to be."[551] Moral good is "that good in beings who

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[546] Crisp identifies the same distinction in Edwards. See Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *JESJ* 4.1 (2014): 38n55.

[547] *WJE* 2:253.

[548] Edwards twice notes that the distinction between moral and natural good and moral and natural attributes is a common one, made by "divines." See *WJE* 23:254–255. Rehnman notes that the distinction is not found in Turretin or Mastricht, nor in Locke, More, or Hutcheson. See Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Distinction between Natural and Moral Attributes Good? Jonathan Edwards on Divine Attributes," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.1 (2010): 58–60. However, Rehnman does point to Samuel Clarke as a possible source for Edwards. Given the significance of Clarke's Boyle lecture *Demonstration of the Begin and Attributes of God* to eighteenth century theologians and Edwards's awareness of it, it is likely that Clarke is one of the divines Edwards has in mind.

In his first eleven propositions, Clarke attempts to rationally demonstrate the existence of an eternal, immutable, independent, self-existent, infinite, simple, omnipresent, intelligent, and wise being who is the supreme cause and author of all things. In proposition 12, he turns to demonstrate that the author of all things is also a "being of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, and all other moral perfections." Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 233–47. Thus, it is likely that the former attributes (eternity, immutability, wisdom, etc) are natural attributes or perfections (Clarke, like Edwards, uses the terms interchangeably). As in the case of Edwards, Clarke appears to root the moral perfections in God's will. What's more, he distinguishes between natural and moral evil in the same way that Edwards does (155).

[549] *WJEO* 2:255.

[550] *WJEO* 2:254.

[551] *WJEO* 2:254.

have will and choice, whereby, as voluntary agents, they are, and act, as it becomes 'em to be and to act, or so as is most fit, and suitable, and lovely."[552] The distinction is best illustrated by the use of angels and demons, who share the same natural goods and excellencies, while being distinguished by their respective moral excellencies. Angels and demons are both strong, intelligent, powerful, and capable of pleasure and pain, but also radically distinct in their holiness and goodness and loves.

From this basic distinction, Edwards thus distinguishes between natural and moral perfections in God.

> So divines make a distinction between the natural and moral perfections of God: by the moral perfections of God, they mean those attributes which God exercises as a moral agent, or whereby the heart and will of God are good, right, and infinitely becoming, and lovely; such as his righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness; or, in one word, his holiness. By God's natural attributes or perfections, they mean those attributes, wherein, according to our way of conceiving of God, consists, not the holiness or moral goodness of God, but his greatness; such as his power, his knowledge whereby he knows all things, and his being eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, his omnipresence, and his awful and terrible majesty.[553]

God's moral perfections are properly seated in his will, and his moral excellency is, properly speaking, his holiness.[554] "Holiness comprehends all the true moral excellency of intelligent beings: there is no other true virtue, but real holiness."[555] This is true of both men and God, since "holiness in man, is but the image of God's holiness."[556] As we saw earlier, all of

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[552] *WJEO* 2:254. See Rehnman, "Is the Distinction between Natural and Moral Attributes Good?," 60.

[553] *WJE* 2:255. In a list of theological questions for ministerial students attributed to Edwards and published by his son, he specifically divides God's attributes into natural and moral perfections.

> 4. How do you prove the natural perfections of God, viz., his intelligence, infinite power, foreknowledge and immutability?
> 5. How do you prove his moral perfections, that he is a friend of virtue, or absolutely holy, true, just and good?

Jonathan Edwards, "Theological Questions," in *Jonathan Edwards Documents* (New Haven, CT: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 1822).

[554] "The moral excellency of an intelligent voluntary being, is more immediately seated in the heart or will of moral agents." *WJE* 2:255.

[555] *WJE* 2:255.

[556] *WJE* 2:256.

God's moral perfections (e.g. his righteousness, justice, faithfulness, mercy, kindness, etc) belong to and are included in his holiness. Indeed, even the true excellency of God's natural perfections is rooted in his holiness.

> 'Tis moral excellency alone, that is in itself, and on its own account, the excellency of intelligent beings: 'tis this that gives beauty to, or rather is the beauty of their natural perfections and qualifications. Moral excellency is the excellency of natural excellencies. Natural qualifications are either excellent or otherwise, according as they are joined with moral excellency or not. Strength and knowledge don't render any being lovely, without holiness; but more hateful: though they render them more lovely, when joined with holiness.[557]

The strength, knowledge, and majesty of angels is more glorious and lovely because of their holiness, whereas the strength, knowledge, and majesty of devils is more hateful because of the absence of holiness. Of course, in God's case, we cannot separate his moral and natural perfections. God's "moral attributes can't be without his natural attributes: for infinite holiness supposes infinite wisdom, and an infinite capacity and greatness."[558] God's wisdom is a holy wisdom, his majesty a holy majesty, his immutability a holy immutability.[559] Thus, as Edwards repeatedly emphasizes in his discussion of the natural and moral distinction, it is a distinction only "according to our way of conceiving of God."[560] In himself, God is simple, and thus "all the attributes of God do as it were imply one another."[561]

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[557] *WJE* 2:257.
[558] *WJE* 2:256–257.
[559] *WJE* 2:257.
[560] Edwards reiterates this point five times in his brief discussion of the moral and natural attributes. *WJE* 2:255, 256, 257–258 (2X), 266.
[561] *WJE* 2:257.

6.3.1 Natural and Moral Image

Edwards's distinction between moral and natural attributes has an important corollary in his anthropology. The corollary is based on his notion of a person.[562] Recall that, in his *Discourse on the Trinity*, Edwards defines a person as "that which hath understanding and will."[563] This understanding of person applies equally to God and to creatures, with important qualifications given divine infinitude and simplicity.

The connection between Edwards's definition of person and his understanding of moral and natural attributes may be found in the following quotation from *Religious Affections*.

> As there are two kinds of attributes in God, according to our way of conceiving of him, his moral attributes, which are summed up in his holiness, and his natural attributes, of strength, knowledge, etc. that constitute the greatness of God; so there is a twofold image of God in man, his moral or spiritual image, which is his holiness, that is the image of God's moral excellency (which image was lost by the Fall); and God's natural image, consisting in men's reason and understanding, his natural ability, and dominion over the creatures, which is the image of God's natural attributes.[564]

Here Edwards argues for a correlation between God's attributes as we conceive them and the image of God in man.[565] Barone rightly argues that "the natural image is the mere formal possession of the faculties of understanding and will, which make a creature capable of rational and moral agency, since also God is a rational and moral agent."[566] On the other hand, the spiritual image "is the capacity to be a specific kind of rational and moral agent, that is, a holy and righteous agent."[567] Or perhaps better, the spiritual image is not merely a *capacity* to be a holy agent, but the *activity* of being a holy agent. This explains Edwards's frequent comparison

[562] Barone rightly argues that "Edwards construct his theological anthropology of the will using God's nature as a model." See Marco Barone, "The Relationship between God's Nature, God's Image in Man, and Freedom in the Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8.1 (2018): 39.

[563] *WJE* 21:133–34.

[564] *WJE* 2:256.

[565] So Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 39. who notes the importance of the "As…so" conjunctions.

[566] Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 40.

[567] Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 40.

of the godly life to God's pure actuality. In a sermon from November 1743 on Deuteronomy 5:27-29, Edwards likens the vibrant activity of the redeemed soul to God's own active will. "There is nothing in heaven and earth of a more active nature" than godliness, since "it is life itself," resembling "the divine nature that is pure act."[568] He makes a similar point in a sermon on 2 Kings 23:25, in which he seeks to demonstrate that "true religion is a thing of very active nature." It is "most like the Divine Being's nature, which is infinitely active, indeed pure act."[569] The distinction between faculty or capacity and act is evident in Edward's explanation of the image of God in man in *Freedom of the Will*.

> The essential qualities of a moral agent are in God, in the greatest possible perfection; such as understanding, to perceive the difference between moral good and evil; a capacity of discerning that moral worthiness and demerit, by which some things are praiseworthy, others deserving of blame and punishment; and also a capacity of choice, and choice guided by understanding, and a power of acting according to his choice or pleasure, and being capable of doing those things which are in the highest sense praiseworthy. And herein does very much consist that image of God wherein he made man (which we read of Gen. 1:26, 27 and ch. 9:6), by which God distinguished man from the beasts, viz. in those faculties and principles of nature, whereby he is capable of moral agency. Herein very much consists the natural image of God; as his spiritual and moral image, wherein man was made at first, consisted in that moral excellency, that he was endowed with.[570]

Thus, the natural image refers merely to the possession of the faculties of understanding and will by which he is "*capable* of moral agency," whereas the spiritual image refers to the activity of those same faculties as directed towards God as one's ultimate end, which constitutes

[568] "723. Deut. 5:27-29" in *WJEO* 61. Edwards makes this same point in *Religious Affections*, though without specifically tying it to God as pure act. "True grace is not an unactive thing; there is nothing in heaven or earth of a more active nature; for 'tis life itself, and the most active kind of life, even spiritual and divine life." *WJE* 2:398.

[569] Edwards demonstrates the divine vitality exegetically by appealing to the fact that God never slumbers or sleeps (Psalm 121). See "875. II Kgs. 23:25" in *WJEO* 65.

[570] *WJE* 1:166.

the moral excellency of an agent. For Edwards, therefore, there is a "structural and formal analogy between God's and human nature as expressed through their respective faculties."[571]

Edwards's entire approach to attributes is built on a series of likenesses and unlikenesses, comparisons and contrasts between God and creatures that corresponds to the classical *via eminentiae* and *via negativa*.[572] Edwards testifies directly to the *via eminentiae* in *Nature of True Virtue*.

> We never could have any notion what understanding or volition, love or hatred are, either in created spirits or in God, if we had never experienced what understanding and volition, love and hatred are in our own minds. Knowing what they are by consciousness, we can add degrees, and deny limits, and remove changeableness and other imperfections, and ascribe them to God. Which is the only way we come to be capable of conceiving of anything in the Deity.[573]

Our conceptions of God and his attributes are derived from our experience, and then an ascent to God by adding degrees, denying limits, and removing imperfections. The removal of imperfections also suggests the *via negativa*, which Edwards also identifies in *Freedom of the Will*. "'Tis by metaphysics only, that we can demonstrate, that God is not limited to a place, or is not mutable; that he is not ignorant, or forgetful; that it is impossible for him to lie, or be unjust; and that there is one God only, and not hundreds or thousands."[574] Additionally, the connection between God's moral and natural attributes, and the moral and natural image in man recalls the

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[571] Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 41. "Edwards conceives human nature according to the archetypal pattern of God's nature. A person possesses understanding and will because God, who created that person according to the divine natural image, possesses understanding and will" (43).

[572] "Edwards's account supposes, for instance, that as intellect and will can be predicated distinctively to human beings, so intellect and will can be predicated distinctively to divine being; and as natural perfection and moral perfection can be predicated distinctively to human beings, so natural and moral perfection can be predicated distinctively to divine being. His reasoning that God must be conceived in the highest degree and that attributes are in God in the greatest possible perfection supposes clearly that a similarity between God and creatures can be truly predicated. God is the fountain, source, and rule of everything that exists apart from himself. Every perfection is originally in God, and there is no perfection that is not derived from God; but perfections are in God in the highest degree or in the greatest possible perfection." Rehnman, "Is the Distinction between Natural and Moral Attributes Good?" 62–63. For a treatment of the *via eminentiae* and *via negativa* among the Reformed orthodox, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:213–21.

[573] *WJE* 8:591–92. So Rehnman, "Is the Distinction between Natural and Moral Attributes Good?" 66.

[574] *WJE* 1:424.

scholastic distinction between attributes of essence, intellect, and will. However, in Edwards's case, he appears to combine attributes of essence and attributes of intellect into the single category of natural attributes.

6.4 Real and Relative Attributes

In the exposition of the *Discourse on the Trinity*, we noted that Edwards embraced a real-relative distinction in speaking of God's attributes. Real attributes simply are the persons of the Godhead, understood in terms of a psychological account of the Trinity. Relative or modal attributes are these same attributes in a variety of views and relations. This classification is similar to the absolute-relative classification found among the Reformed orthodox, but with an Edwardsean twist.

Discourse on the Trinity is not the only place in his corpus where Edwards expresses this taxonomy of attributes. Miscellany 94, written about the same time as Edwards began the *Discourse*, contains much of the same reasoning as we have sketched above. As in the *Discourse*, Edwards, like Keckermann and Ramsay, believes that the psychological account of the Trinity is "within the reach of naked reason."[575] We may put Scripture and reason together in order to make "safe and certain deductions" that enable us to say more than what Scripture says in express words.[576] One of these deductions of reason that accords with Scripture is the conviction that there are three and only three really distinct in God—one that is begotten from another, one that proceeds from the first two, and one that is neither begotten nor proceeding. Edwards then expresses the same basic argument as in the *Discourse* regarding the generation of

[575] *WJE* 13:257. In my judgment, it's likely that Edwards later moderates his claims about the doctrine of the Trinity being within the reach of naked reason. See, for example, "Miscellany 1340. Reason and Revelation" in *WJE* 23:359-376.

[576] Edwards's insistence on saying more than what Scripture expressly says is likely a response to anti-Trinitarians who demanded a rigid biblicism which eschewed additional theological categories and speculation.

the Son by God's self-reflection and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit as the mutual love between Father and Son, complete with Scriptural confirmation. God having an idea of himself yields a duplicity. God loving and delighting in himself yields a triplicity.[577]

These rationally-established distinctions are the only conceivable distinctions in God. Power, wisdom, goodness, and holiness in God are either relations of these or reducible to these. Power is a relation of adequateness and sufficiency to other things, which Edwards reduces to the Father. Wisdom is identical to God's idea, which is simply the Son of God. Goodness "is nothing but infinite love," which is the Holy Spirit. Likewise, with holiness, which is "God's sweet consent to himself" or "perfect delight in himself."[578]

A significant section in *The End For Which God Created the World* demonstrates that Edwards maintained this approach to God's attributes throughout his life. In the final section of his treatise, Edwards attempts to show that God's ultimate end in creation of the world is one singular thing. God's ultimate end is spoken of in Scripture "under various denominations," yet they are all speaking of one fundamental reality. The various names all involve each other in their meaning, either as different names of the same thing, or names of parts of a single whole, or that same whole viewed in various lights, or in different respects and relations. But ultimately, "all that is ever spoken of in scripture as an ultimate end of God's works, is included in that one phrase, *the glory of God*," which is the most common name and the most appropriate.[579]

Edwards defines the glory of God as "the emanation and true external expression of God's internal glory and fullness; meaning by his fullness, what has already been explained" (in chapter 1, section 3 of the dissertation). Or again, the glory of God, as the end of creation is

[577] *WJE* 13:262. Edwards's use of the term "triplicity" is a deviation from the language employed by Turretin and Leigh. See the discussion in chapter 4.

[578] *WJE* 13:263.

[579] *WJE* 8:526.

"God's internal glory extant, in a true and just exhibition, or external existence of it."[580] The obscurity surrounding the term is owing to both the imperfection of language and the sublimity of the subject. Thus, it is better to use multiple names and expressions, and consider the subject "as it were by parts." Presupposed here is the common conviction of medieval and Reformed scholasticism that human knowledge and language is inadequate to comprehend God.

Considering the glory of God in terms of its parts (according to our way of conceiving), Edwards includes in it 1) the exercise of God's perfections to produce a proper effect; 2) the manifestation of internal glory to created understandings; 3) the communication of infinite fullness of God to creature; 4) The creature's high esteem of God, love to God, complacence and joy in God; and proper exercises and expressions of these.[581] This echoes Edwards's earlier arguments in chapter 1.2 and 1.3 of *End of Creation*. The glory of God, when considered in terms of parts, consists in the manifestation of God's perfections, knowledge of those perfections, and love and delight in those perfections, and the exercises and expressions of this knowledge and love. It's also noteworthy that, though the creature is not a constituent part of the glory, the creature's knowledge, praise, and joy *is*.

These four parts may appear to be very distinct, but they are really one thing in a variety of relations. They are the emanation of God's glory, "the excellent brightness and fullness of the divinity diffused, overflowing, and as it were enlarged; or in one word, *existing ad extra*."[582] Edwards draws a connection between the exercising of God's perfections and the communication of his fullness, noting that communication which is the result of the exercise is "of the internal glory or fullness of God, as it is." Edwards then makes the same theological move that he makes

[580] *WJE* 8:527.

[581] *WJE* 8:527; So William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards, William Rowe, and the Necessity of Creation," ed. J. Jordan and D. Howard-Snyder (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1996), 120.

[582] *WJE* 8:527.

in *Discourse on the Trinity* and in Miscellany 94.

> Now God's internal glory, as it is in God, is either in his understanding, or will. The glory or fullness of his understanding, is his knowledge. The internal glory and fullness of God, which we must conceive of as having its special seat in his will, is his holiness and happiness. The whole of God's internal good or glory, is in these three things, viz. his infinite knowledge ; his infinite virtue or holiness, and his infinite joy and happiness. Indeed there are a great many attributes in God, according to our way of conceiving or talking of them : but all may be reduced to these ; or to the degree, circumstances and relations of these. We have no conception of God's power, different from the degree of these things, with a certain relation of them to effects. God's infinity is not so properly a distinct kind of good in God, but only expresses the degree of the good there is in him. So God's eternity is not a distinct good ; but is the duration of good. His immutability is still the same good, with a negation of change. So that, as I said, the fullness of the God-head is the fullness of his understanding, consisting in his knowledge, and the fullness of his will, consisting in his virtue and happiness. And therefore, the external glory of God consists in the communication of these.[583]

This passage contains a number of important features. First, Edwards appears to alter the three distinct things from what he expresses in the *Discourse*. One triad (God, his idea, and his love) seems to be replaced by another (knowledge, holiness, and happiness). However, the divergence is only an apparent one. As we saw in the *Discourse*, holiness and happiness (or, to put it another way, his love and delight) are the very same thing in God, distinguished only modally and circumstantially. The original punctuation of the *End For Which God Created the World* (preserved above) demonstrates this identification. Edwards specifies three things (understanding, virtue/holiness, and joy/happiness), but separates the first from the second two with a semi-colon, and separates the second two with only a comma, thereby linking God's virtue and his happiness as having a seat in his will. The reason for bifurcating in this passage what he elsewhere identifies is perhaps owing to his polemical aims in the *End*.

Second, the great variety of God's attributes is owing to "our way of conceiving or talking of them." Properly speaking, these attributes are reducible to God, his knowledge, and his

[583] *WJE* 8:528.

virtue/happiness, or to the degree, circumstances, and relations of these. Power relates God's real attributes to certain effects. Infinity is a matter of degree; eternity, of duration; immutability, of a negation of change. All of God's attributes can be reduced or nested into one of the fundamental "real" attributes. Thus, Edwards essentially combines his strong psychological account of the Trinity with the absolute-relative distinction in God's attributes.[584] The result is that "the fullness of the Godhead is the fullness of his understanding, consisting in his knowledge, and the fullness of his will, consisting in his virtue and happiness."[585]

Following from this, the external glory of God consists simply in the communication of his knowledge, virtue, and happiness. The manifestation of God's glory to created understandings is implied in the communication of God's fullness, as is the communication of love for and delight in God to created wills. Thus, the only real variety in the communication of God's glory is "what necessarily arises from the distinct faculties of the creature, to which the communication is made, as created in the image of God." In other words, just as the external missions of the persons of the Trinity follows and corresponds to the internal processions of the Trinity, so also the communication of God's fullness *ad extra* follows and corresponds to the internal glory and fullness of God.[586]

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[584] In *End of Creation*, Edwards does not assign the divine attributes to persons, but simply reduces them to knowledge, love/holiness and joy. The reason for not making the Trinitarian sub-current clear is likely his polemical purposes, which include supplying an argument that would be compelling to deists and other anti-Trinitarians, and his geometric method, by which he restricts himself (at this point in the treatise) to only the dictates of reason. In other words, Edwards makes a structurally, but only implicit, Trinitarian argument, one that becomes evident when *End of Creation* is read in light of his wider Trinitarian thought. Holmes provides an alternative (though conceivably complementary) reason, speculating "that Edwards decided that his Trinitarian theology needed spelling out in a work devoted to that purpose, and that until he had done that a piecemeal use o this distinctive categories would merely cause confusion. Particularly with *the Essay on the Trinity* also in hand, Edwards may have decided to leave the doctrinal connections in the *End of Creation* implicit, with the intention of spelling them out when he came to write his projected statement of the whole of Christian theology." Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory*, 55.

[585] *WJE* 8:528.

[586] See Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 72–75.

It is worth underscoring the importance of this correspondence for Edwards throughout his writings. In Miscellany 448, Edwards writes the following.

> God is glorified within himself these two ways: (1) by appearing or being manifested to himself in his own perfect idea, or, in his Son, who is the brightness of his glory; (2) by enjoying and delighting in himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards himself, or, in his Holy Spirit.
>
> So God glorifies himself towards the creatures also two ways: (1) by appearing to them, being manifested to their understandings; (2) in communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying the manifestations which he makes of himself. They both of them may be called his glory in the more extensive sense of the word, viz. his shining forth, or the going forth of his excellency, beauty and essential glory ad extra. By one way it goes forth towards their understandings; by the other it goes forth towards their wills or hearts. God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in, when those that see it delight in it: God is more glorified than if they only see it; his glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that he might communicate, and the creature receive, his glory, but that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his having an idea of God's glory don't glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it. Both these ways of God's glorifying himself come from the same cause, viz. the overflowing of God's internal glory, or an inclination in God to cause his internal glory to flow out *ad extra*. What God has in view in neither of them, neither in his manifesting his glory to the understanding nor communication to the heart, is not that he may receive, but that he [may] go forth: the main end of his shining forth is not that he may have his rays reflected back to himself, but that the rays may go forth.[587]

In Miscellany 1082, Edwards writes of the communication of God's perfection to created understandings and the diffusion of his sweetness, blessedness, happiness and joy. Connecting the former to light and the latter to heat, he writes that "this twofold way of the Deity's flowing forth *ad extra* answers to the twofold way of the Deity's proceeding *ad intra*, in the proceeding and generation of the Son and the proceeding and breathing forth of the Holy Spirit."[588] Indeed, this flowing forth *ad extra* is only "a kind of second proceeding of the same persons." He makes the same point in Miscellany 1151.

[587] *WJE* 13:495–496.
[588] *WJE* 20:466.

> These two ways of the divine good beaming forth are agreeable to the two ways of the divine essence flowing out or proceeding from eternity within the Godhead in the person of the Son and Holy Spirit: the one in an expression of his glory, in the idea or knowledge of it; the other the flowing out of the essence in love and joy. It is condecent that, correspondent to these proceedings of the divinity *ad intra*, God should also flow forth *ad extra*.
>
> The one last end of all things may be expressed thus: it is that the infinite good might be communicated, that it might be communicated to, or rather in, the understandings of the creature, which communication is God's declarative glory; and that it might be communicated to the other faculty, usually (though not very expressively) called the will; which is the making the creature happy in God as a partaker of God's happiness.[589]

Noteworthy here is that the communication of God's internal glory is both "to" and "in" the two faculties of the creature, thus preserving a distinction between the Creator and the creature. The communication of the glory of God is fittingly compared to the effulgence or emanation of light from a luminary, since such effulgence involves both light (which is often compared to knowledge in the Scriptures) and heat (which often represents love and joy). Thus, the various expressions used in Scripture may be reduced to one thing—"God's internal glory or fullness extant externally." Or to put it the other way around, the variety we perceive in the glory of God is owing to the refracting of the singular glory by virtue of the various circumstances, relations, and effects the glory bears to creation, much as light refracts into a great variety and diversity of colors.

In sum, alongside the natural-moral classification, the other major Edwardsean division of attributes is the real-relative distinction, which may be regarded as an Edwardsean twist on the scholastic absolute-relative distinction. Additionally, though Edwards never gives a full and systematic classification of attributes, we may infer additional divisions within the relative category based on certain statements in his published works. In particular, Edwards appears to

[589] *WJE* 20:525. See also, Miscellany 1218, *WJE* 23:150–153.

have divided relative attributes into negative attributes and what we may call sufficiency or capacity attributes.

6.4.1 Negative Attributes

One of the more striking aspects of Edwards's classification system is the inclusion of attributes such as immutability, infinity, and eternity in the relative category. Typically, these attributes were regarded as incommunicable, essential, or absolute attributes. However, Edwards is clear that he does not regard them as "real" attributes, but instead places them in the modal or relative category. Crisp objects to placing such attributes in the relative category, what he refers to as "extrinsic attributes." Extrinsic attributes are attributes "that are not part of an entities nature, but (usually) pertain to some relation that entity has with some other thing." According to Crisp, "immutability, eternity, and infinity cannot be relations of this sort. They must be part-and-parcel of the divine nature because without them God would not be a perfect being."[590] Or again, "the modes and relations Edwards lists in the *Discourse*, especially immutability, infinity, and eternity, cannot be extrinsic or even Cambridge properties because they bespeak something about the divine nature independent of anything created."

Assuming that Crisp's use of the terms "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" corresponds to Edwards's real and modal/relative distinction, my contention is that Edwards's classification is essentially the same as the absolute-relative classification as expressed among the Reformed orthodox, with Edwards radicalizing the distinction by wedding it to his strong psychological account of the Trinity. If this is true, then how can attributes like infinity, immutability, and eternity be relative (or extrinsic, to use Crisp's terms)? First, it is worth noting that, to take one

[590] Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 56–57.

example, eternity is identified as a relative attribute by Turretin and others, who regard it as a relation of divine infinity to time, just as his omnipresence is a relation of divine infinity to space. But Edwards says more than this, apparently placing infinity itself in the relative category.

The answer lies, I believe, in a simple recognition of the meaning of terms like infinity, immutability, eternity, and the like. Each of these is an apophatic or negative attribute; they speak of God by *denying* to him some creaturely property. In other words, each of these attributes depends for its meaning on that aspect of creation which it denies. So, for example, infinity ("being without bounds or limitations") depends for its meaning on the existence of something finite, bounded, and limited (in other words, on creation, or the idea of creation). Immutability only has meaning *in relation to* something mutable. Eternity is meaningless apart from the concept of time. Even divine simplicity, understood as a denial of composition, depends for its intelligibility on the existence (actual or possible) of composite beings.

In this light, Edwards's inclusion of infinity, immutability, and eternality under the rubric of relative attributes makes sense. Properly speaking, there is only God (or his being), his idea, and his love (or the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Once we posit creation—finite, mutable, and temporal—we may now speak of God's being as *not* finite, *not* mutable, and *not* temporal. These are modes by which the triune God in the fullness of his absolute divine life is distinguished from his creatures, according to our way of conceiving. And thus even these attributes are shown to be modal and relative, and not real and absolute in the Edwardsean sense.[591]

[591] This is precisely the form of reasoning expressed by Anselm when he writes that terms like "supreme" and "greater" could not be "intelligibly thought" with respect to God unless there was something else to which the comparison was made. The intelligibility of supremacy as a divine attribute depends upon the existence of something other than God, over which he is supreme. And, Anselm says, "what goes for 'supreme' goes similarly for terms that are similarly relative." St. Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27. Edwards's innovation lies in recognizing that even attributes like immutability and infinity are relative in this sense.

6.4.2 Capacity Attributes

The other major subdivision of relative attributes may be called "capacity attributes."[592] In *End of Creation*, Edwards writes the following.

> It seems a thing in itself fit, proper and desirable that the glorious attributes of God, which consist in a sufficiency to certain acts and effects, should be exerted in the production of such effects as might manifest the infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, etc., which are in God. If the world had not been created, these attributes never would have had any exercise. The power of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects, must forever have been dormant and useless as to any effect. The divine wisdom and prudence would have had no exercise in any wise contrivance, any prudent proceeding or disposal of things; for there would have been no objects of contrivance or disposal. The same might be observed of God's justice, goodness and truth.[593]

Here Edwards speaks of the manifestation of capacity attributes. I call these capacity attributes, since they consist in "a sufficiency to certain acts and effects." Edwards mentions power, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness as examples of this type of attribute.[594] Attributes such as immutability or aseity are not included, since they do not consist in a sufficiency to certain effects.

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[592] The term comes from Schultz and refers only to those attributes that consist in a sufficiency (or capacity) to certain acts and effects. Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation and Spinoza's Conundrum," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 2.2 (2012): 45.

[593] *WJE* 8:428–429. Other references to "dormant attributes" in *End of Creation* include "If it be fit that God's power and wisdom, etc., should be exercised and expressed in some effects, and not lie eternally dormant, then it seems proper that these exercises should appear, and not be totally hidden and unknown. For if they are, it will be just the same as to the above purpose, as if they were not" (431). And, "There is included in this the exercise of God's perfections to produce a proper effect, in opposition to their lying eternally dormant and ineffectual: as his power being eternally without any act or fruit of that power; his wisdom eternally ineffectual in any wise production, or prudent disposal of anything, etc" (527).

[594] In an early Miscellany (ww), Edwards identifies the four beasts that appear in Ezekiel and Revelation represent four fundamental attributes of God. "But what are these four in God that have the management of providence? What four divine things are they that have the management of the world, that turn the wheel of providence and carry it just as they go? Answer this question, and the whole mystery will be unraveled at once. I answer, they are wisdom, power, goodness, and justice. These are the four attributes of God that have [to do] with the world, and these only; the rest concern himself." *WJE* 13:192. Noteworthy here is that Edwards distinguishes between attributes concerning God himself (absolute attributes), and attributes that have to do with the world (relative attributes). However, it doesn't appear that Edwards maintained the claim that there are *only* four relative attributes; instead his thought moved in a different direction, contending that there are only three absolute (or real) attributes: God's being, knowledge, and love.

There are four components to a capacity attribute manifestation. First, there is the attribute itself, which is a sufficiency to some effect. Second there is an *exercise* of that sufficiency.[595] Third, there is the *effect* of that exercise. And fourth, there is the *manifestation* of the attribute *in* the exercise and effect. Consider the following illustration. A vase has the attribute of fragility. Fragility consists in a sufficiency to break when the requisite force is applied. The vase possesses the attribute apart from its manifestation. However, when the vase falls and strikes the ground, the attribute is *exercised* in the shattering. The *effects* of this exercise are the pieces scattered on the floor, and the attribute is *manifested* in the shattering and the resulting pieces on the floor. Or again, an artist has the attribute of skillful creativity. He *exercises* this attribute in the act of painting a beautiful picture. The picture is the *effect* of the exercise of his attribute, and the attribute is *manifested* in the act of painting and the resulting work of art.

Edwards claims that apart from creation, such capacity attributes would have no exercise. They would have been "dormant and useless to any effect." This dormancy has no effect on God's knowledge; he knows his capacity attributes independently of their exercise and effects.[596] But, he says, if the attributes are excellent, then their exercise is excellent, since the excellency of the attribute is derived from its relation to its effect. The value of the sufficiency and the value of the exercise and effect are correlated.[597] Thus, if God values the sufficiency, then it is natural and fit that he value the exercise and expression.[598]

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[595] Edwards seems to treat the terms "exercise," "operation," and "exertion" as equivalent. Likewise, the terms "manifest" and "express" appear to be equivalent, and the terms "attributes," "excellencies," and "perfections" are equivalent.

[596] *WJE* 8:429.

[597] So Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Necessity of Creation," 121.

[598] "Edwards argues, first, that the *nature* of the attributes in question is such that their *value* not only confers value on the effects of their use, but more profoundly is of a piece—monolithic and unanalyzable—with their associated potential effects…There is therefore a kind of dual dependency. The *value* of the effects depends primarily upon the attributes. But the *nature* of the attributes, being defined by their effects, *to that extend and in*

Some scholars have criticized Edwards for claiming that God has potentially dormant attributes.[599] The notion of dormancy seems to run counter to God's aseity and self-sufficiency, since it seems that God is dependent upon the existence of the world for the manifestation of such "dormant" attributes. Edwards supports his conception of dormant attributes with a modified quotation from Gilbert Tennent.

> The end of wisdom (says Mr. G. Tennent, in his Sermon at the opening of the Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia) is design; the end of power is action; the end of goodness is doing good. To suppose these perfections not to be exerted, would be to represent them as insignificant. Of what use would God's wisdom be, if it had nothing to design or direct? To what purpose his almightiness, if it never brought anything to pass? And of what avail his goodness, if it never did any good?[600]

Because of the criticisms leveled at Edwards because of this passage, it is worth dwelling on precisely what he means by "dormant" attributes. Thankfully, in Miscellany 553, he offers the same argument, but expands on what he means by dormancy. The first part of 553 anticipates the relevant section of *End of Creation*.

> 553. End of the Creation. There are many of the divine attributes that, if God had not created the world, never would have had any exercise: the power of God, the wisdom and prudence and contrivance of God, and the goodness and mercy and grace of God, and the justice of God. It is fit that the divine attributes should have exercise. Indeed God knew

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that way depends upon the effects so that their value is, in that manner, dependent on the potential effects." Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation and Spinoza's Conundrum," 46–47. Elsewhere, Schultz notes that normally we believe that the value of an ability "is *defined by* its effects, and its value is *realized in* its effects." However, God is unique in this regard, since the inherent value of his abilities "cannot be dependent on their exercise or on any effects that occur because or as a result of their exercise…had God never created, the attributes would still have remained inherently valuable." Thus, for God, while God's capacity attributes are *defined by* their effects in a semantic sense, in the ontological sense, the effects of God's attributes do not add any inherent value to the attributes themselves, since creation is *ex nihilo*. Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Philosophical Argument for God's End in Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 314–315. In this way, Schultz's account of divine attributes differs from Lee's account of dispositions, since, for Lee, a habit or disposition only "attains full actuality through the exercise of that habit or disposition." Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 7.

[599] James Beilby, "Divine Aseity, Divine Freedom: A Conceptual Problem for Edwardsian-Calvinism," *JETS* 47.4 (2004): 649. See also John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 172 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 90–93, though Bombaro does not think that Edwards's concept of dormant attributes compromises aseity.

[600] *WJE* 8:429n3. For Edwards's modifications to Tennent's original, see the editor's explanation in the footnote itself.

> as perfectly, that there were these attributes fundamentally in himself before they were in exercise, as since; but God, as he delights in his own excellency and glorious perfections, so he delights in the exercise of those perfections.[601]

The next paragraph clarifies that these dormant attributes were not dormant in every sense. "Tis true that there was from eternity that act in God within himself and towards himself, that was the exercise of the same perfection of his nature." Thus, not only did God *know* these attributes apart from their exercise to proper effects, he actually *exercised* these attributes within and toward himself eternally, apart from creation. However, "it was not the same kind of exercise: it virtually contained it, but there was not explicitly the same exercise of his perfection."[602] The language of virtuality is significant. It is the opposite of explicit, and synonymous with implicit.[603]

> That eternal act or energy of the divine nature within him, whereby he infinitely loves and delights in himself, I suppose does imply fundamentally goodness and grace towards creatures, if there be that occasion which infinite wisdom sees fit. But God, who delights in his own perfection, delights in seeing those exercises of his perfection explicitly in being, that are fundamentally implied.[604]

In light of Edwards's trinitarianism, God's infinite love and delight in himself must be recognized as a reference to the procession of the Holy Spirit. Thus, implied within the eternal procession of the Spirit (God's infinite love to himself) is the goodness and grace of God towards creatures, once creatures are in view. Put another way, dormant attributes are virtually contained

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[601] *WJE* 18:97. Note also that Edwards identifies the same four creation-relative attributes as dormant, as he noted in Miscellany ww: power, wisdom, goodness, and justice. However, in this Miscellany, he includes other attributes within this fourfold taxonomy, linking prudence with wisdom, and mercy and grace with goodness.

[602] Lee rightly identifies the different "kinds" of exercise as referring to the *ad intra / ad extra* distinction. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 197.

[603] For example, note the language in the following passage on faith's relation to perseverance: "If it could be so that a man should cease to believe in Christ, and so should not continue to receive him and to be united in his heart to him, it would not be fit that he should continue to be looked upon as one with him; and that, although persons are fully justified and accepted as one with Christ on the first act of faith without waiting till a persevering faith has actually had existence. For it may influence before it has actual existence, because it has existence already *implicitly and virtually*. The first act of faith virtually implies a perseverance in faith, by virtue of its own nature and God's constitution considered jointly." *WJE* 21:360–361.

[604] *WJE* 18:97.

within the processions of the Godhead. Or, yet again, dormant capacity attributes are one variety of relative attributes, which are reducible to real attributes, which simply are the persons of the Godhead.[605]

To summarize, Edwards distinguishes between an eternal, immanent exercise of God's attributes, which simply is the generation of the Son (by which God knows himself) and the procession of the Spirit (by which God infinitely loves and delights in himself). These immanent exercises virtually and implicitly contain all other exercises of these attributes. Attributes such as power, goodness, wisdom, and righteousness may be called dormant with respect to their exercise *ad extra*, since such capacity attributes consist in a sufficiency to some external effects. But they are not dormant absolutely, but only relatively speaking. God knows, loves, and exercises these "dormant" attributes insofar as he knows and loves himself in his triune life, and his love for these attributes *as sufficiencies* includes and implies a love for the exercise and manifestation of these attributes in appropriate effects. Thus, given God's love for his attributes, it is fit, proper, and desirable (though not necessary) that such capacity attributes be manifested in correspondent effects, and this attribute manifestation is both absolutely and originally good and valuable and a consequence of God's creation of the world.[606]

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[605] Edwards makes a similar move with respect to God's knowledge in Miscellany 94. "Misc. 94 'Tis also said that God's knowledge of himself includes the knowledge of all things; and that he knows, and from eternity knew, all things by the looking on himself and by the idea of himself, because he is virtually all things; so that all God's knowledge is the idea of himself." The claim that God "virtually is all things" ought not to be understood in a pantheistic fashion. Instead, it is equivalent to the notion that God "comprehends all being," such that there is no being outside of God's being which adds to his being. It is a way of expressing the absolute derivation and dependence of all created being on God's being. *WJE* 13:257.

[606] A confirmation for this understanding of dormancy in Edwards may be found by considering an excerpt from Ramsay that Edwards records in Miscellany 1253. In it, Edwards collects various strands of Ramsay's rational argumentation for the necessity of the Trinity based on the notion that "The absolutely infinite mind must be infinitely, eternally and essentially active and productive of an absolutely infinite effect," which Ramsay eventually identifies as the divine Idea and the divine Love, or the Son and the Spirit. *WJE* 23:184. In order to make this argument, Ramsay notes the following (the quotation marks indicate Ramsay's remarks; the rest is Edwards):

> "Men generally imagine that God is infinitely active, only because he can produce innumerable beings from without, or distinct from himself; but unless the faculty be forever reduced into act, it is not infinite activity, but infinite power. It is a real inaction, though it supposes an infinite capacity of acting. Now such

In other words, the absolute-relative classification of attributes provides the answer to the dilemma posed by potentially dormant capacity attributes. Because the attributes in question are capacity attributes and therefore a subset or relative attributes, they are reducible to God's being, knowledge, and love, and therefore were never dormant in a real or absolute sense. They always found full and complete exercise in the eternal and necessary generation of the Son and procession of the Holy Spirit. All of God's capacity attributes are virtually contained in his self-knowledge and his self-love. It is the second, free but fitting, procession of God's fullness *ad extra* that results in God's creation of the world, which exercises God's capacity attributes *as* capacities (in creating and sustaining the world, in doing good to creatures, in judging sinners). But these capacity attributes are simply names that we give to God's real attributes in relation to various aspects of creation, according to our way of conceiving.[607]

6.5 Correlating Attribute Classification Systems

The next chapter will briefly illustrate Edwards's classification system through a treatment of select attributes. However, before proceeding to that treatment, it is worth taking stock and correlating the various classification systems that Edwards uses. Setting aside the communicable-incommunicable distinction (since Edwards affirms but does not make this distinction central to his overall taxonomy), let us consider the real-relative distinction, the

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> inactive powers as lie dormant during a whole eternity in God, are absolutely incompatible with the perfection of the divine nature which must be infinitely, eternally, and essentially active." And since God "cannot be eternally active from without, or upon anything external; he must be eternally active from within; and since his essence is indivisible, and cannot act by parcels, he must be necessarily, and immanently active, according to the whole extent of his infinite nature."

According to Ramsay, we say that God is infinitely active, not because he creates or is able to create, but because there is an immanent, eternal, necessary, and indivisible act in God. Dormancy with respect to external effects does not entail an absolute dormancy, because of the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit.

[607] So Strobel in Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 102.

natural-moral distinction, and the negative-positive distinction which emerges from the *via ementiae* and the *via negativa*. These sets of distinctions are not alternative ways of categorizing attributes, but are instead complementary ways of understanding God, according to our way of conceiving of him. The first two distinctions operate in different directions, distinguishing attributes based on divine faculties (understanding and will) and then again based on relation to creation. The psychological account of the Trinity, built as it is on the correlation between human personhood and divine personhood, provides the distinctions necessary to categorize natural and moral perfections. Creation *ex nihilo*, or the God-world relation, provides the distinction necessary to categorize real and relative attributes, using the *via eminentiae* (by which creaturely perfections are enlarged to an infinite degree) and the *via negativa* (by which creaturely limitations are denied to God). Thus, an Edwardsean taxonomy of attributes might be represented by this chart:

	Person	**Real Attributes**	**Relative Attributes**
Natural Attributes	Father	Being / Life	Negative: Infinity, Eternality, Omnipresence, Immutability, Simplicity Positive: Majesty, Greatness, Omnipotence (Capacity)
Natural Attributes	Son	Idea / Knowledge	Positive: Omniscience, Wisdom (Capacity)
Moral Attributes	Holy Spirit	Will / Love / Joy / Holiness	Positive (Capacity): Grace, Mercy, Faithfulness, Righteousness, Retributive Justice, Wrath

CHAPTER 7 A SURVEY OF SELECT ATTRIBUTES

7.1 Introduction

In order to better understand Edwards's taxonomy, a brief survey of select attributes is in order. The goal of this survey is not exhaustive, but illustrative. In particular, the aim of the survey is two-fold. First, it shows that in defining and describing individual attributes, Edwards is very similar to his Reformed orthodox forebears. Second, it shows how his classification system works by categorizing them based on the foregoing system.

7.2 Negative Attributes

We begin with so-called negative attributes. These are modal and circumstantial, denying to God creaturely limitations and features. For Edwards, divine infinity is the fundamental quality separating the creature from the Creator. He expresses this well in Miscellany 135.

> Many have wrong conceptions of the difference between the nature of the Deity and created spirits. The difference is no contrariety, but what naturally results from his greatness and nothing else, such as created spirits come nearer to, or more imitate, the greater they are in their powers and faculties. So that if we should suppose the faculties of a created spirit to be enlarged infinitely, there would be the Deity to all intents and purposes, the same simplicity, immutability, etc.[608]

Here Edwards presents what is strictly speaking an impossibility (the enlargement of creaturely faculties to an infinite degree) in order to illustrate that the fundamental dividing line between God and his creatures lies in his infinite greatness.[609] What's more, divine infinity is linked with other incommunicable attributes such as simplicity and immutability that sharply distinguish God from his creatures.

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[608] *WJE* 13:295. See also *WJE* 8:441.

[609] Crisp's treatment of this passage seems to assume that Edwards thinks such a metaphysical enlargement is actually possible. Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 31–33. Instead, it seems clear that Edwards is positing what is strictly speaking an impossibility in order to illustrate a particular point—in this case, that infinitude (greatness) is the fundamental dividing line between Creator and creature, containing within it other divine attributes like simplicity and immutability. He makes similar use of an impossible supposition when in *End of Creation*, he posits a third arbiter, neither Creator nor creature, in order to determine what is fit for God to do with regard to creation. *WJE* 8:422-425.

In Miscellany 697, Edwards makes a number of striking claims about divine infinity. "To be infinite is to be all."[610] Edwards coins the term "omneity" to refer to this "all-ness" of God, and ties it directly to God's infinity. Omneity ought not be understood in pantheistic fashion, but as a way of expressing the reality that there is nothing outside of God, and thus no limit or boundary to his being.[611] "An infinite being…must be an all-comprehending being. He must comprehend in himself all being."[612] The term "comprehend" is a significant Edwardsian term of art. For a being to be comprehended in God means that it is derived from and dependent upon him for everything. It means that "God is the sum of all being, and there is no being without his being; all things are in him, and he in all."[613] If something were not comprehended in God, it would be underived and independent, and thus could be added to God's being, which would imply that God's being had a limit and that he was a part of some larger whole. Created being is not an addition to God's being, but a communication from God, in the same way that reflections of the sun's light don't add to the sum total of light and yet are not identical to or parts of the sun. Elsewhere Edwards uses the term "comprehend" to describe the way in which holiness "comprehends all the true moral excellency of intelligent beings." A good man's "love to God, his gracious love to men, his justice, his charity, and bowels of mercies, his gracious meekness and gentleness, and all other true Christian virtues that he has, belong to his holiness."[614] Thus, to be comprehended by something is to belong to that something, to be virtually contained in it, in the way that the color white comprehends all other colors.[615] Thus for Edwards, God is an all-

[610] *WJE* 18:281–282.

[611] See the discussion in John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 172 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 79–83.

[612] *WJE* 18:281–282.

[613] *WJE* 20:122.

[614] *WJE* 2:255.

[615] Edwards connects white and holiness in the following entry in his *Shadows of Divine Things*. "White, which comprehends all other colors, is made use of in Scripture often to signify holiness, which comprehends all

comprehending Being: he "possesses being in general…His name is 'Jehovah,' 'I Am,' or existence itself, absolute, universal, infinite existence. And all other existence is but a communication from him."[616]

Schweitzer argues that in his writings Edwards affirms both a qualitative and quantitative infinity. The former is an absolute infinity by which God is unlimited without qualification. The latter is an infinitude "as an unlimited amount of what can exist in finite quantities." The former establishes a radical disjunction between the infinite and the finite, between God and creation. The latter establishes "a trajectory of continuity between the finite and infinite."[617] He correlates these two types of infinity to metaphysical and mathematical notions of the infinite. Metaphysical infinity is characterized by "completeness; wholeness; unity; universality; absoluteness; perfection; self-sufficiency; autonomy." Mathematical infinity is a potential but "un-traversable" infinite, a "continually receding conceptual horizon."[618] Schweitzer claims that Edwards "decisively modified" the tradition of divine infinity through this "complex notion of infinity" that enabled him "to conceptualize God as both radically transcendent to creation and internally related to it in a positive way."[619] However, as Muller noted in a previous section, the Reformed orthodox also sought to distinguish between an absolute and intrinsic infinity, which set God apart from creation, as well as a relative and extrinsic infinity, which related God to his creation such that he is present to it at every time and place.

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moral goodness and virtue." *WJE* 11:69. Elsewhere he writes that love is not only the most excellent thing in Christianity and the quintessence of all religion, but is "that which virtually comprehends all holy virtues and exercises." *WJE* 21:170.

[616] *WJE* 27:4. The divine names are precisely why Edwards is able to identify God with real existence. *WJE* 6:345.

[617] Don Schweitzer, "Edwards' Understanding of Divine Infinity," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 53.

[618] Schweitzer, "Edwards' Understanding of Divine Infinity," 54.

[619] Schweitzer, "Edwards' Understanding of Divine Infinity," 49.

With respect to God's eternality and omnipresence, Edwards adopts the standard account given by the Reformed scholastics. "God's essential presence is everywhere alike, both where created things are and where they are not." That is, there is no place outside of God, no wider space in which he exists.[620] "God's influential presence, or presence by operation…is everywhere where any created thing is." He further distinguishes between God's common presence by which he is good to all men, his sanctifying presence in the saints, his comforting presence with his people at some times, and his glorious presence in heaven.[621] God's omnipresence follows from his necessity, his immutability, and his omnipotence.

In his Controversies notebook, Edwards expresses the mysteriousness of God's eternality and omnipresence.

> Is there anything in the doctrine of the Trinity more mysterious, or implying more seem[ing] inconsistencies, than such things as these: God's existing before the world was, and yet there being no succession in God; in being in all places, and yet not extended, not diffused, having no extended parts…that God foreknew things that are to begin to be a thousand years hence, and knows that they will then first begin to be; also knows things that have ceased to be a thousand years ago, and knows that they then ceased to [be], and yet that there is no succession, no such things as "before" and "after" in the Divine Mind; or that God is present in places, and yet neither diffusively present in all places, nor circumscriptively present in one place, nor his whole being distributively present in many places; that he is present in one particular place that can be named, and also present in another place that can be named, and yet that there is no more of God in two, or in a thousand, than in one; that if we add all that is present in many into one sum, there is no increase; that God is as much, or that there is as much of God, in the least atom or point, as in the whole universe?[622]

Elsewhere, he expresses God's eternity using the same terms as Turretin, including the Boethian definition. God's eternity is an "eternal duration, it being without succession, without

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[620] "God is where the world is, and where the world is not, and everywhere where the world is not; God in essence is as much beyond the utmost boundaries of the creation, as it is beyond the bounds of a little ball." "44. Ps 139:7–10" in *WJEO* 42.

[621] "44. Ps 139:7–10" in *WJEO* 42.

[622] "Subjects of Inquiry" in *WJEO* 27

before and after, all at once, *"vitæ interminabilis tota simul et perfecta possessio."*[623] In *Freedom of the Will*, he rejects Watts's notion that God created the world at a particular point within infinite time and infinite space as "a groundless imagination."[624] There is no "infinite length of time before the world was created, distinguished by successive parts, properly and truly so; or a succession of limited and measurable periods of time, following one another, in an infinitely long series," nor is there an "extent of space beyond the limits of the creation, of an infinite length, breadth and depth, truly and properly distinguished into different measurable parts, limited at certain stages, one beyond another, in an infinite series." Instead, the only eternal duration before the world is the "eternity of God's existence, which is nothing else but his immediate, perfect and invariable possession of the whole of his unlimited life, together and at once; *vitæ interminabilis, tota, simul et perfecta possessio*."[625] God's immensity and omnipresence ought not be conceived as an infinite series of miles and leagues, nor should his infinite duration be conceived in terms of months and years.[626]

Finally, in chapter 2, we established that throughout his life Edwards affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity and its corollary, the pure act account of God's nature. He also clearly affirmed other corollaries of that doctrine, such as immutability and impassibility. In a sermon from 1727 on God's love, he says, "Indeed, God is without passions, because all passions imply changeableness and imperfection." Love is not in God as it is in us, owing to

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[623] *WJE* 23:168.

[624] *WJE* 1:385. Elsewhere Edwards writes, "There is, therefore, no difficulty in answering such questions as these: What cause was there why the universe was placed in such a part of space, and why created at such a time? For if there be no space beyond the universe, it was impossible that the universe should be created in another place; and if there was no time before the creation, it was impossible that it should be created at another time." *WJEO* 6:343.

[625] *WJE* 1:386. See also *WJE* 1:268.

[626] Edwards cites Andrew Baxter in support, noting that "Time is nothing but the existence of created successive beings, and eternity the necessary existence of the Deity. Therefore, if this necessary Being hath no change or succession in his nature, his existence must of course be unsuccessive." *WJE* 1:386.

God's infinite perfection, by which love is in him "more eminently" and "in a transcendent and infinite degree."[627] Elsewhere Edwards regards as a maxim the claim that "there is no such thing truly as any pain, or grief, or trouble in God."[628] Real disappointment is foreign to God because of his blessedness, "which represents him as possessed of perfect, constant and uninterrupted tranquillity and felicity."[629]

Thus, when it comes to a number of fundamental attributes of God, Edwards defines and distinguishes them in a very traditional manner, according to the Reformed orthodox tradition.[630] At the same time, each of these attributes would be classified both as incommunicable and as modal or relative, since all negative attributes depend for their meaning on the positive creaturely quality which is denied to God. They are "modes of existence" which are comprehensible only in light of something that is not God. What's more, while in one sense, negative attributes may be classified under the Father (who is the fountain of Godhead and sustains the dignity of the Deity), in another sense, they are equally applicable to all persons, since negative attributes are "modes of existence" and thus apply to the whole divine essence, which subsists in each of the persons.

7.3 Divine Power

In *End of Creation,* Edwards defines God's power as a "sufficiency in [God] to produce great effects."[631] Power is a capacity attribute, and thus a relative attribute. As Edwards says in Miscellany 94, "power always consists in something—the power of the mind consists in its

[627] "Lk 2:14(b)" in *WJEO 42.* In Miscellany 749, Edwards denies that God has any "proper passions." "He acts more of himself, infinitely more purely active, and in no respect passive, as all created minds are in a great measure passive in their acts of will." *WJE* 18:396–397.
[628] *WJEO* 27:5.
[629] *WJE* 1:253.
[630] So Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality*, 75.
[631] *WJE* 8:429.

wisdom, the power of the body in plenty of animal spirits and toughness of limbs, etc.—and as it is distinct from those other things, 'tis only a relation of adequateness and sufficiency of the essence to everything."[632] However, Edwards goes on to note, that if we distinguish power from its relation of adequateness to everything, it is "nothing else but the essence of God." Moreover, insofar as power is that by which God exerts himself, power simply is the Father, "for the perfect energy of God with respect to himself is the most perfect exertion of himself."[633] In other words, the Father, as the fountain of Godhead, is the first and most perfect exertion of himself. Thus, Edwards distinguishes between God's power understood internally (as the Father), and God's power "productive outwardly" (to use Turretin's phrase). Or again, recall Ames's ordering of God's simple power, which precedes the divine knowledge and will, and God's efficient power, which follows the divine knowledge and will. Edwards seems to operate with a similar distinction, with the significant addition of his psychological account of the Trinity, which identifies God's simple power with the Father, and then God's efficient power with God's sufficiency toward external effects.

Elsewhere, Edwards treats God's power as an aspect of God's sovereignty, "whereby he is able to do what he pleases, without control, without any confinement of that power, without any subjection in the least measure to any other power; and so without any hindrance or restraint, that it should be either impossible, or at all difficult, for him to accomplish his will; and without any dependence of his power on any other power, from whence it should be derived, or which it should stand in any need of: so far from this, that all other power is derived from him, and is absolutely dependent on him."[634] God's infinite power implies two things: that he is able to do

[632] *WJE* 13:262.
[633] *WJE* 13:262.
[634] *WJE* 1:379–380.

everything that doesn't imply a contradiction to itself or to his own holy nature, and that he is able to do whatever he pleases without any difficulty or pains.[635] His power follows from his independence, since, as the first, eternal, and independent being, he "can't depend upon any other being for anything in himself, and therefore don't depend upon any other being for power or assistance."[636] Thus, like his Reformed forebears, Edwards links God's power with possibility, and defines possibility in terms of repugnance (whether logical or moral).

7.4 Divine Knowledge

Moving from divine power to divine knowledge, we've already noted that Edwards repeatedly identifies God's self-knowledge with the Son. The Son, as the divine Logos, is the divine essence subsisting in Idea. God generates the Son by thinking of himself, or by reflecting on his own infinite essence.[637] The sum of the divine knowledge and wisdom consists in this perfect idea of himself, so that all other knowledge is included within it. In a sermon on divine strength from 1753, Edwards writes, "he knows all things at once…he comprehends all things in a single glance."[638] Elsewhere he says, He "comprehends all things, from eternity to eternity, in one, most perfect, and unalterable view."[639] God's knowledge is infinite and simple.

> Where his essence is, there his knowledge is: for knowledge is his essence. God is infinite knowledge: he is all understanding, all eye. And in him there is no distinction between faculty or habit, and act. That that he habitually knows, he knows actually; he has it every moment in perfect view. It is not with God as it is with men: there are many things that men have an habitual knowledge of that are laid up in the storehouse of their memories, that they can't actually think of at that time; but God has forever the same

[635] "68. Dan. 4:35" in *WJEO* 43:68. In an unpublished sermon on Romans 1:20, Edwards says, "Infinite Power consists in that in being able to do all things in their own nature possible."
[636] "68. Dan. 4:35" in *WJEO* 43:68.
[637] *WJE* 21:114–121.
[638] *WJE* 25:643–644.
[639] *WJE* 1:268. God is "infinite in understanding and has everything in full and perfect view at once." *WJE* 20:80.

> unchangeable, actual view of everything that he habitually knows, and therefore has an actual understanding of all the behavior of the children of men.[640]

There is no succession in God's knowledge, because his knowledge "is absolutely perfect, to the highest possible degree of clearness and certainty: all things, whether past, present or to come, being viewed with equal evidence and fullness; future things being seen with as much clearness, as if they were present; the view is always in absolute perfection; and absolute constant perfection admits of no alteration, and so no succession; the actual existence of the thing known, don't at all increase, or add to the clearness or certainty of the thing known: God calls the things that are not, as though they were; they are all one to him as if they had already existed. But herein consists the strength of the demonstration before given, of the impossibility of the not existing of those things whose existence God knows; that it is as impossible they should fail of existence, as if they existed already."[641]

A fuller grasp of Edwards's view of God's knowledge naturally should naturally include some discussion of Edwards's idealism.[642] Edwards famously argues that the actual material universe exists "nowhere but in the mind," and that the entire material universe is "absolutely dependent on idea."[643] That is, all created reality exists in God's mind, in the form of divine ideas. However this raises an important question: Given Edwards's idealism, what distinguishes the actual creation (which is simply ideas in God's mind) from other possible creations (which are also simply ideas in God's mind)? In other words, among the Reformed orthodox, the divine

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[640] "137. Job 34:21" in *WJEO* 44:137. Note the affirmation of divine simplicity.

[641] *WJE* 1:267-268. Thus, whether we speak in terms of God's foreknowledge, after-knowledge, or concomitant knowledge (according to our way of conceiving of things), all of it is certain and infallible, according to the philosophical necessity by which a thing becomes necessary once it has occurred. *WJE* 1:264.

[642] On Edwards's idealism, see the chapters by Wainwright, Wessling, Farris, Crisp, and Tan in James S. Spiegel, *Idealism and Christian Theology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and S. Mark Hamilton, vol. 1 of *Idealism and Christianity* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[643] On the sources of Edwards's idealism, see Sebastian Rehnman, "Towards a Solution to the 'Perennially Intriguing Problem' of the Sources of Jonathan Edwards' Idealism," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 5.2 (2015): 148–49.

will and decree distinguishes creation as *ideal* and *merely possible* from creation as *real* and *actual*. But for Edwards, the real and actual is also, at bottom, ideal. As he says, "things as to God exist from all eternity alike. That is, the idea is always the same, and after the same mode."[644] So, if they exist "to God" from all eternity alike, what distinguishes ideal possible worlds from the ideal actual world? Answer: God's intention to communicate his ideas to his creatures.

> And indeed, the secret lies here: that which truly is the substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God's mind, together with his stable will that the same shall gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws: or in somewhat different language, the infinitely exact and precise divine idea, together with an answerable, perfectly exact, precise and stable will with respect to correspondent communications to created minds, and effects on their minds.[645]

Note the two elements included in constituting the substance of bodies: the idea in God's mind, together with his stable will to communicate that idea to us and other minds according to fixed methods. In other words, a perfectly stable idea in God's mind is insufficient to constitute the actual creation. This stable idea must be accompanied by a corresponding will to communicate the idea to created minds. In other words, the distinction between possible and actual creation lies in the tendency of God's will *to the creature*. Or again, it lies in the *relation* of the idea to the created mind. Thus, even in his idealism, Edwards maintains the same pattern as Ames and Turretin in thinking of the possibility of creation and the actuality of creation. He simply clarifies that the will that intervenes to make a possible world actual is specifically God's willing that his idea of a possible world be communicated to created minds so that the world becomes actual.

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[644] *WJE 6:*355.
[645] *WJE* 6:344.

Thus, the actual world simply is the communication of God's ideas to created minds. But this raises an additional question. On Edwards's view, the world is clearly *divine*-mind-dependent. But by constituting the world according to the communication to created minds, has Edwards not made the world *creature*-mind-dependent? Or to say it another way, do bodies exist outside of *creaturely* minds? To this question, Edwards clearly affirms that the world exists outside of human minds in the following note from *The Mind*.

> But, it may be asked, how do those things exist which have an actual existence, but of which no created mind is conscious—for instance the furniture of this room when we are absent and the room is shut up and no created mind perceives it—how do these things exist? I answer, there has been in times past such a course and succession of existences that these things must be supposed to make the series complete, according to divine appointment of the order of things; and there will be innumerable things consequential which will be out of joint—out of their constituted series—without the supposition of these. For upon supposition of these things are infinite numbers of things otherwise than they would be, if these were not by God thus supposed; yea, the whole universe would be otherwise, such an influence have these things by their attraction and otherwise. Yea, there must be an universal attraction in the whole system of things from the beginning of the world to the end; and to speak more strictly and metaphysically we must say, in the whole system and series of ideas in all created minds, so that these things must necessarily be put in to make complete the system of the ideal world. That is, they must be supposed if the train of ideas be in the order and course settled by the supreme mind. So that we may answer in short, that the existence of these things is in God's supposing of them, in order to the rendering complete the series of things—to speak more strictly, the series of ideas—according to his own settled order and that harmony of things which he has appointed. The supposition of God which we speak of is nothing else but God's acting in the course and series of his exciting ideas, as if they, the things supposed, were in actual idea.[646]

Creaturely unperceived objects (such as furniture in an empty room) have an actual existence, which consists in "God's supposing of them, in order to the rendering complete the series of things." In other words, they actually exist in the divine mind as divine supposals of what creatures *would* perceive, if they looked in the room.[647] Such supposals are necessary so

[646] *WJE* 6:356–57.

[647] As he says elsewhere, "The existence of things, therefore, that are not actually in created minds, consists only in power, or in the determination of God that such and such ideas shall be raised in created minds upon such conditions." *WJE* 6:355. See the discussion in Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality*, 112–15.

that creation is complete and not "out of joint." In order for the series of divine ideas that constitute the world to have integrity in the mind of creatures, God must suppose those creaturely unperceived objects, even in the absence of creaturely perception.[648] Thus, again, Edwards maintains the integrity of the world using an idealist version of the same pattern extant in Ames and Turretin: God's will moves things from a state of possibility to a state of actuality.

This understanding of the divine knowledge, divine ideas, and the actual world clarifies whether Edwards is, as some critics claim, an immaterial anti-realist. For example, Oliver Crisp identifies Edwards's idealism as an immaterial anti-realism "because Edwards thinks that all that exists is mind dependent, and, in some fundamental sense, *divine* mind-dependent. There is no material world independent of God's mind or created minds."[649]

However, his description of this anti-realism contains a noteworthy non-sequitur.

> If metaphysical realism entails some mind-independent reality that exists out there beyond human minds, then strictly speaking, this Edwardsean picture of an immaterial world is antirealist, which is a rather surprising consequence of his immaterialism. For on the Edwardsean position outlined thus far, our minds and ideas are radically dependent on the divine mind. In fact, as far as Edwards was concerned, in the strictest sense nothing exists independent of the divine mind and its mental contents. All created things, including created minds, exist as ideas in God's mind or as ideas projected by God's mind.[650]

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[648] "That is, all ideal changes of creatures are just so, as if just such a particular atom had actually all along existed even in some finite mind, and never had been out of that mind, and had in that mind caused these effects which are exactly according to nature, that is, according to the nature of other matter that is actually perceived by the mind. God supposes its existence; that is, he causes all changes to arise as if all these things had actually existed in such a series in some created mind, and as if created minds had comprehended all things perfectly." *WJE* 6:354

[649] Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on God's Relation to Creation," *JESJ* 8.1 (2018): 6; See also Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 72–74.

[650] Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 73. Based on Crisp's description of anti-realism, it would seem that all Christians throughout history have been anti-realists. For example, he gives the following description of metaphysical anti-realism:

> God is the only true substance; we exist as created substances in some transient and radically dependent sense, but we are not subsistent like God. That is, we do not have independent existence as God does; in the language of scholastic theology, we are not fundamental substances, strictly speaking. Only God is such a fundamental substance. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on God's Relation to Creation," 6.

If realism includes the claim that there is *created*-mind-independent reality, then Edwards's position clearly entails a kind of realism. For while reality is not outside of the divine mind, Edwards is clear that the world does exist outside of human minds, even as it is always conceptually *related to* created minds.[651] Creaturely unperceived objects exist as divine supposals of what creatures would perceive under certain conditions, so as to render complete the entire series of ideas that constitutes the world. Thus, while both created minds and the objects of the world are God's intentional ideas, this divine idealism grounds realism, insofar as creatures are concerned.[652] To use a spatial metaphor, the vertical (God -> world) idealism grounds the horizontal (human -> world) realism.[653]

Later in the same paragraph he writes, "This picture is metaphysically antirealist because Edwards thinks that all that exists is mind dependent, and, in some fundamental sense, *divine* mind-dependent. There is no material world independent of God's mind or created minds."

If metaphysical realism includes notions such as creaturely independence from God, creatures as subsistent like God, creatures as fundamental substances, and matter as existing independent from God's mind, one wonders which Christian theologians have ever been metaphysical realists? Crisp has, perhaps, inadvertently demonstrated that Edwards's view is not nearly as exotic and radical as he otherwise suggests.

[651] Interestingly, Hamilton contends that anti-realism "denies that created minds exist independently of the *divine* mind." S. Mark Hamilton, *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards, Continuous Creation and Christology*, vol. 1 of *A Series of Treatises on Jonathan Edwards* (JESociety Press, 2017), 20, italics added. This means that "God is the only true substance and created minds are radically dependent for their existence…upon the divine mind." Hamilton contends that Edwards does "substantialize" created minds by virtue of the human nature of the Son, which is the pattern for all humanity. Thus, Edwards may be construed as an immaterial *realist*.

[652] Hamilton calls this "relative realism," which insists that everything is dependent on the uncreated mind of God, but certain things exist independently of created minds. Hamilton, *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards, Continuous Creation and Christology*, 25–27.

[653] Ironically, Crisp notes precisely this sort of immaterial realism immediately before the above quotation.

> One could argue that, provided we exist as divine ideas, or provided our minds are sustained by the divine mind—upon which our minds are radically dependent for their continuing existence—then realism is preserved. For then we really do exist; our ideas really do exist; and the world around us really exists independent of our minds, because all these things (the world, created mind, and their ideas) exist in the mind of God. In this way, God's continuing to think of the created world—you and me included—is, if you like, the objective guarantee that the world will persist through time. Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 73.

This seems to me to be precisely Edwards's view. So Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards (Religion in America Series)*, Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27–36.

Additionally, Edwards is clear that his idealist account of creation has a high degree of strictness and abstraction, one that runs the risk of producing misunderstanding. But in no way does his idealism entail a denial of our normal way of perceiving and accounting for the world. Things truly are in the places that we perceive them to be, for even our notion of place is an idea as well.

> We would not, therefore, be understood to deny that things are where they seem to be, for the principles we lay down, if they are narrowly looked into, do not infer that. Nor will it be found that they at all make void natural philosophy, or the science of the causes or reasons of corporeal changes; for to find out the reasons of things in natural philosophy is only to find out the proportion of God's acting. And the case is the same, as to such proportions, whether we suppose the world only mental in our sense, or no.[654]

Thus, for Edwards, his idealism is not contrary to realistic, scientific descriptions of the world, but instead accounts for these descriptions in such a way as to preserve the world's absolute and total dependence upon God. Scientific descriptions of reality are simply our ways of describing God's normal ways of acting, by which he acts according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws.[655] Indeed, Edwards insists that "we may speak in the old way, and as properly and truly as ever: God in the beginning created such a certain number of atoms, of such a determinate bulk and figure, which they yet maintain and always will; and gave them such a motion, of such a direction, and of such a degree of velocity; from whence arise all the natural changes in the universe forever in a continued series."[656] Edwards is simply suggesting that this series does not exist perfectly anywhere but *in the divine mind*. It is his determination and design

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[654] *WJE* 6:353.

[655] See Miscellany 1263 (*WJE* 23:201–212) for Edwards's discussion of God's arbitrary operations and God's natural operations. Arbitrary operations refer to God's immediate and direct activity, whereas natural operations are limited by fixed laws. Thus, natural laws, as fixed and established methods for God's acting, are natural operations. All natural operations are ultimately resolved into the arbitrary operation of creation *ex nihilo*, by which God establishes the laws of nature which limit subsequent natural operations. Additionally, miracles and God's activity in regeneration are examples of immediate and arbitrary operations. See Hamilton, *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards, Continuous Creation and Christology*, 50–58.

[656] *WJE* 6:353.

to unite these ideas together and to communicate these ideas together to creatures that constitutes their regularity insofar as we perceive them. Thus, Edwards views his idealist account of the world and the normal scientific account of the world as complementary.[657]

7.5 The Divine Will and the Divine Decree

As with divine power and divine knowledge, we may distinguish the divine will (which is the key factor distinguishing natural and moral attributes) as an absolute attribute and as a variety of relative attributes. Absolutely speaking, the divine will is simply the Holy Spirit, or the Deity in act, since "there is no other act but the act of the will."[658] This act of the will is the divine essence breathed forth in love and joy, as the Father and Son mutually delight in each other. Love and joy are both apt descriptions of this absolute attribute, since they are "the very same thing in God," being scarcely distinguishable in creatures, with the only difference being modal or circumstantial.[659] Additionally, in *End of Creation*, Edwards identifies this absolute attribute with God's holiness by means of his explication of the principle of proportionate regard.

In his discussion of what reason seems to dictate concerning God's original ultimate end in the creation of the world, Edwards supposes that God's end must be himself, if this is possible. Having previously ruled out God's existence and perfection as possible ends (since neither is attainable by the act of creation, but both are prerequisites for God's acting), the question is whether God himself is capable of being his own end in creation. God is objectively the most

[657] Thus, McClymond is far nearer the mark when he writes, "God's consciousness constitutes the ground of all reality…This theocentric idealism differs from anthropocentric idealism (such as Kantianism) by locating an imperturbable basis for all acts of knowing outside of the human mind itself, in the terra firma of the divine being…Edwards's idealism is quite consistent with an objective approach to epistemology…Only because Edwards's epistemology is radically God-centered does he succeed in his peculiar combination of empiricism and idealism." McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 33. So also Tan, who regards Edwards as "an objective idealist." Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 60–63.

[658] *WJE* 21:121.

[659] *WJE* 21:114.

valuable being ("the greatest and best of Beings"), thus fulfilling a key component of the reason's dictates (namely, that God's original ultimate end must be superior in value to all others). Edwards then spends considerable time demonstrating that, in his actions, God must have the greatest respect to himself by coordinating and illustrating the principle of proportionate regard with God's moral rectitude and holiness.[660]

Put simply, the principle of proportionate regard states that we ought to value things according to their value.[661] Objectively, in terms of inherent worthiness, excellence, and importance, creation is nothing compared to God. Thus, if God (subjectively) values things according to their (objective) value, he must value himself most highly. To fail to do so would be contrary to his perfect nature, his wisdom, his holiness, and his rectitude. God's moral rectitude disposes him to do what is fit, which means God's moral rectitude consists in his having infinitely the highest regard to himself. Edwards restates the argument thusly.

> Therefore if moral rectitude of heart consists in paying the respect or regard of the heart which is due, or which fitness and suitableness requires, fitness requires infinitely the greatest regard to be paid to God; and the denying supreme regard here would be a conduct infinitely the most unfit. Therefore a proper regard to this Being is what the fitness of regard does infinitely most consist in. Hence it will follow that the moral rectitude and fitness of the disposition, inclination or affection of God's heart does chiefly consist in a respect or regard to himself infinitely above his regard to all other beings: or in other words, his holiness consists in this.[662]

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[660] On the background to Edwards's use of the principle of proportionate regard and the language of moral fitness, see Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' Argument That God's End in Creation Must Manifest His Supreme Self-Regard," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.1 (2014): 98. McClymond notes that the principle of proportionate regard is a key "conceptual link" between *End of Creation* and *True Virtue*. "*End of Creation* applies the principle of proportionate regard to God and God's actions, while *True Virtue* applies it to creatures and creatures' actions." McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 53–54.

[661] Schultz notes that Edwards regards this principle as an entailment of God's perfection. Schultz, "Supreme Self-Regard," 93. "For we must suppose *from the perfection of God's nature*, that whatsoever is valuable and amiable in itself, simply and absolutely considered, God values simply for itself; 'tis agreeable to him absolutely on its own account; because God's judgment and esteem are according to truth." *WJE* 8:426, italics mine.

[662] *WJE* 8:422.

Thus, with respect to God, Edwards correlates the following concepts: the principle of proportionate regard = valuing things according to their value = the moral rectitude of God's heart = God's valuing and loving himself infinitely and supremely = God's holiness.[663] Edwards goes on to note that it is fitting that this supreme regard for himself should appear in God's word and works, in what he says and what he does.

Turning to God's relative moral attributes, we've already noted that attributes such as faithfulness, mercy, grace, and wrath are nested within God's holiness and self-love. Such relative attributes are refractions of God's holiness and love in relation to some aspect of creation (e.g. God's promises, miserable sinners, recalcitrant rebels). To understand how this refraction occurs, we must briefly examine Edwards's view of the divine decrees, a subject which occupied him in many of his miscellanies.

Miscellany 704 explicitly makes the link between God's decree and his relative attributes.[664] In it, Edwards offers an extended reflection on the relation between God's general end in creation and God's particular method for accomplishing this end. The miscellany itself is an extended reflection on God's decrees, particularly as it impinges on the supralapsarian and infralapsarian debate. Edwards is seeking to demonstrate that certain aspects of the decrees of predestination and reprobation are prior to the decree to create and then permit the fall, and certain aspects are consequent upon the decree to create and then permit the fall. Moreover, there is a certain asymmetry between predestination and reprobation. In doing so, Edwards also anticipates aspects of his argumentation in *End of Creation*.

[663] In light of Edwards's psychological account of the Trinity, it's worth noting that Edwards here effectively identifies the principle of proportionate regard with the Holy Spirit, and that such identification is possible because of divine simplicity.

[664] *WJE* 18:314-317.

Edwards begins by noting that the entire discussion of the ordering of God's decrees is oriented by human conception, according to our way of conceiving of God. This means that though we, as temporal creatures, must speak temporally about the decrees, ordering them sequentially as though one temporally followed another, the fact of the matter is that we are actually speaking about the logical ordering of God's decrees.

What divines intend by prior and posterior in the affair of God's decrees, is not that one is before another in the order of time, for all are from eternity, but that we must conceive the view or consideration of one decree to be before another, inasmuch as God decrees one thing out of respect to another decree that he has made; so that one decree must be conceived of as in some sort to be the ground of another, or that God decrees one because of another, or that he would not have decreed one had he not decreed that other.[665]

Thus Edwards, like Ames and Turretin, was willing to speak in terms of priority and posteriority, but that this was a logical, not a temporal priority, since all of God's decrees are eternal.[666] There are two respects in which one decree might be prior to another decree. First, ends are prior to their means. The good aimed at is prior to the method selected for obtaining it.[667] Second, one decree must be prior to another when the first is "the ground on which the disposer goes in seeking such an end by another thing decreed, as being the foundation of the capableness or fitness that there is in that other thing decreed to obtain such an end."[668]

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[665] *WJE* 18:314. See also *WJE* 1:376.

[666] This appears to be a shift from Edwards's early views, in which he argued that the ordering was mutual and harmonious, without positing that one thing was necessarily the ground or foundation of the other. In an early miscellany (29), Edwards writes that "God decrees all things harmoniously and in excellent order; one decree harmonizes with another, and there is such a relation between all the decrees as makes the most excellent order. Thus God decrees rain in drought because he decrees the earnest prayers of his people; or thus, he decrees the prayers of his people because he decrees rain." *WJE* 13:216.

[667] So William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 7.51, 99. "In the things which God wills there is a certain order to be conceived. He wills the end before the means to the end because he works according to the most perfect reason."

[668] *WJE* 18:315.

The grammar of the latter claim is difficult, but its meaning may be illustrated by considering the following decree:

D1) God decrees to glorify his justice through punishing sin.

This particular decree presupposes two prior decrees. First, it presupposes God's decree to glorify his justice in general, since D1 is the selected means by which God's justice will be glorified. But second, D1 presupposes the decree to permit sin, since "sinfulness is the foundation of the possibility of obtaining that end [glorifying justice] by such means [punishment]."[669] God must have the *sin* of man in view prior to his decree that he glorify his justice in punishing *sin*. "His having sin is the foundation of both the fitness and [the] possibility of justice being glorified in the punishment of his sin."[670] God must have a consideration of the propriety and fitness of the means to obtain the end prior to fixing on the means. Thus, in different senses, "both the sin of the reprobate, and also the glory of divine justice, may properly be said to be before the decree of damning the reprobate."[671] The fact that sinfulness is presupposed in the decree to damnation is what "clears God of any injustice in such a decree."

Edwards then proceeds to explore the relation between different types of ends, as well as the relation of different types of ends to God's attributes. God's ultimate end in the highest sense—what he here calls a "mere ultimate end" but will later (in *End of Creation*) call an "original ultimate end"—is "the shining forth of God's glory, and the communication of his goodness."[672] The only thing prior to this in the decree is the "mere" or "absolute" possibility of it, "because possibility is of necessity in his decree." That is, as with Turretin, God's decrees are in some way "limited" by possibility, either logical or moral. When it comes to "lower" ends and

[669] *WJE* 18:315.
[670] *WJE* 18:315.
[671] *WJE* 18:315.
[672] *WJE* 18:316.

decrees, there are other things that are prior to these lower ends, things which stand in the same place that "mere possibility" does in relation to the highest ultimate end. In *End of Creation*, Edwards will refer to these lower ends either as subordinate ends (if they are purely instrumental) or as consequential ultimate ends (if they are valuable in themselves, but presuppose various circumstances).

Edwards then illustrates the difference between mere ultimate ends and means to those ends through a discussion of God's attributes. In doing so, he demonstrates that the distinction between ends in the higher and lower senses parallels the distinction between absolute and relative attributes. God's *vindictive* justice is not an ultimate end in the highest sense, but a means to glorifying his holiness and greatness, which is a mere ultimate end. Thus, vindictive justice should not be considered a distinct attribute to be glorified, but instead a "certain way and means for glorifying an attribute." Indeed, "every distinct way of God's glorifying or exercising an attribute might as well be called a distinct attribute, as this. 'Tis but giving a distinct name to it; and so we might multiply attributes without end."[673] Putting this in terms of the absolute-relative distinction, distinct *exercises* of *absolute* attributes may be identified as distinct *relative* attributes. Indeed, exercises of relative attributes may yield additional attributes, as God is brought into relation to increasingly specific aspects of creation. Edwards regards God's mercy and grace in precisely the same way as vindictive justice. As was the case with Turretin, just as vindictive justice presupposes the prior sinfulness of the subject, so God's mercy "presupposes the subject to be miserable" and God's grace "supposes the subject to be sinful, unworthy and ill-

[673] *WJE* 18:316.

deserving."[674] Each of these latter attributes are "only certain ways or means for the glorifying the exceeding abundance and overflowing fullness of God's goodness and love."[675]

Thus, the following sketch of the logical ordering of God's decrees begins to appear.

1. God eternally decrees to glorify his love, communicate his goodness, and glorify his greatness and holiness. (Nothing is prior to this decree except the mere possibility of it). This decree includes God's design to glorify his goodness and love eternally *to a certain number* (the elect).[676]
2. God decrees the creation and fall of man. This decree follows from the previous, since God's decree to glorify his love "necessarily implies the happiness of the creature, and gives both their being and happiness."[677] The decree to permit the fall entails that, from this point, human beings are considered, not merely as creatures, but as sinners.
3. God decrees to show mercy and grace to the elect and to punish the reprobate. This decree makes a distinction within the larger common class of sinners. The decree to show mercy and grace is now the means by which God will glorify his goodness and love, since mercy and grace simply are his love and goodness exercised in relation to miserable and unworthy sinners. Similarly, the decree to punish the reprobate is now the means by which God will glorify his greatness and holiness.

In sum, God's relative moral attributes are simply exercises of God's holiness or self-love in a variety of circumstances and toward a variety of objects. God's grace is God's self-love

[674] *WJE* 18:317. cf. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.20.7–10, 242–243.
[675] *WJE* 18:317.
[676] It appears that Edwards does not regard this "certain number" as particular individuals, since this decree is prior to the decree to create the particular individuals he does. Thus, the "certain number" identifies a bounded, but general class of people, who will be filled out and identified through God's decree to create and permit the fall, and his decree to distinguish some sinners by electing them.
[677] *WJE* 18:317.

exercised toward undeserving creatures. God's mercy is the same self-love or holiness exercised towards those who are miserable and afflicted. Strikingly, God's wrath is reducible to God's love, as the blazing delight God has in himself encounters unrepentant rebels who despise his glory. These exercises of God's holiness, love, and joy might be further particularized, as God exercises his grace toward unique objects; the exercise of his grace toward Paul, while rooted in the same fundamental and absolute attribute, might be conceived as a distinct attribute from the exercise of grace toward Peter.[678]

7.6 Summary

The preceding survey demonstrates that in his definition and understanding of infinity, eternality, omnipresence, immutability, impassibility, omnipotence, omniscience, grace, mercy, faithfulness, and wrath, Edwards lies squarely within the Reformed scholastic tradition as represented by Owen, Turretin, and Ames, including his nesting of attributes. Moreover, his treatment of divine power, divine knowledge, and the divine decrees bears striking affinity to the same subjects as represented by Ames and Turretin. Finally, it seems that, for Edwards, God's decree is what refracts his real and absolute attributes (his being, knowledge, and love,

[678] Edwards makes the identical move in discussing the manifestations of grace in the regenerate soul. In his *Treatise on Grace*, he contends that the saving grace which distinguishes saints from the unconverted is "radically but one."

> However various its exercises are, yet it is but one in its root; 'tis one individual principle in the heart.
>
> 'Tis common for us to speak of various graces of the Spirit of God as though they were so many different principles of holiness, and to call them by distinct names as such: repentance, humility, resignation, thankfulness, etc. But we err if we imagine that these in their first source and root in the heart are properly distinct principles. They all come from the same fountain, and are, indeed, the various exertions and conditions of the same thing; only different denominations according to the various occasions, objects and manners, attendants and circumstances of its exercise. There is some one holy principle in the heart that is the essence and sum of all grace, the root and source of all holy acts of every kind, and the fountain of every good stream, into which all Christian virtues may ultimately be resolved, and in which all duty and holiness is fulfilled." *WJE* 21:166.

understood in terms of his psychological account of the Trinity) into a myriad of relative attributes which enable us to know and speak rightly of him.

CHAPTER 8 DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, DIVINE FREEDOM, AND THE NECESSITY OF CREATION

8.1 Introduction

The final chapter will bring the previous discussion of Edwards's taxonomy of divine attributes into the contested arena of Edward's view of the God-world relation. In particular, I will examine the claims that Edwards is a panentheist who departed from the Reformed orthodox tradition on the question of divine freedom and creation's necessity. This examination will require bringing Edwards's taxonomy of attributes into conversation with his view of the freedom of the will, necessity, contingence, and fitness. Before doing so, it will be useful to survey some of the claims of scholars with respect to Edwards's view of the God-world relation.

8.2 Claims Concerning Edwards's View of the God-World Relation

Crisp maintains that Edwards's view of the God-world relation is a species of panentheism containing the following constituents:

P1. The world exists 'in' God. (Core thesis.)
P2. God is not the world. God and the world are distinct entities. (The antipantheism thesis.).
P3. God is essentially creative. He must create a world because it is his nature to create a world. He is 'disposed' to create a world. (The essential divine creativity thesis.)
P4. Although it is radically contingent on divine fiat, this world is the necessary product of God's essential creativity. (The necessity of creation thesis.)
P5. The world is created by eternal divine fiat, though it begins to exist in time. (The eternal creation thesis.)
P6. God must create the best possible world. (The best possible world thesis.)
P7. The created world is ideal; it exists in the divine mind. (The immaterial antirealist thesis.)
P8. God continuously creates the world ex nihilo. God eternally decrees that no created thing persists through time; each 'moment' of creation is numerically distinct from the previous one; God constitutes these many world-stages as one four-dimensional entity, namely, 'the world' (i.e., the created order). (The four-dimensionalist continuous creation thesis.)

P9. God is the sole causal agent, that is, the efficient cause of all that comes to pass. (The occasionalism thesis.)[679]

For our purposes P1 to P5 are the most relevant. P1 and P2 mean that "the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists 'in' him in some sense, although his being is not exhausted by the creation."[680] Similarly, John Cooper believes that Edwards's panentheism "borders on Spinozan pantheism," and that "Edwards lacks the robust ontological Creator-creature distinction of classical theism."[681] For Edwards, God is the "all-comprehending being" who "[comprehends] in himself all being" such that all of his creatures are but "communications from him."[682]

P3-P5 are especially important for Crisp's view of Edwards's theology as a whole.[683] According to Crisp, for Edwards, "God is motivated to create because he is essentially creative."[684] "God's nature is such that he must create a world, and that he must create this world."[685] On Crisp's reading, Edwards is unequivocal that "'being creative' or 'being a creator'

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[679] Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142–44.

[680] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 142. Crisp's general definition of panentheism is taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1213) by way of John Cooper. See John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers—From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 27. Panentheism is the belief that "the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in Him, but His Being is more than, and not exhausted by the universe." Crisp, *God and Creation*, 140. At one point, Crisp raises the issue of whether creation ought to be understood as God's body (93). While he eventually rejects such a notion in light of Edwards's idealism, the possibility that Edwards's supposed Neoplatonic emanationism could lead to something like the created order as the body of God is worth bearing in mind. See John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 172 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), who contends for just this sort of mind-body panentheism in Edwards.

[681] Cooper, *Panentheism*, 77.

[682] *WJE* 18:281.

[683] See Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 90–120.

[684] Elsewhere Crisp says it would be better to say that God is "essentially diffusive." Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 95. However, fundamental to Crisp's interpretation is the equation of God's acts of creation and emanation.

[685] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 8, 43–56. "It is not merely that God may create or refrain from creating. According to Edwards, it is necessary for God to create, since it is part of his nature to be creative or effusive." Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 104. So also, Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 201n76.

is an essential or (as he puts it) 'original' *property* of the divine nature."[686] According to Crisp, nowhere is this more clear than in *End of Creation* where Edwards writes that "*a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation."*[687] From this passage and others like it, Crisp concludes that "the divine nature is configured such that God must create a world, because the act of creation is a 'propensity of nature,' a 'necessary consequence of God 'delighting in the glory of his own nature.'"[688]

For many scholars, such a view of creation's necessity poses a problem for divine freedom. For if God has an essential disposition to create such that creation is necessary, how may God's freedom be preserved? Following Richard Muller, Crisp argues that on the question of divine freedom, Edwards departs from his Reformed orthodox forebears. For their part, the Reformed orthodox distinguished between two types of freedom: liberty of spontaneity and liberty of indifference. The former is "freedom from coaction or coercion" whereby "God is not constrained by anything external to himself."[689] This sort of freedom applies to God's willing himself and his own glory, both of which are absolutely necessary and yet freely done, since they are not done under external constraint. However, with the respect to the created order, not only

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[686] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 53. "This is particularly apparent upon reading his dissertation *The End of Creation*, where Edwards claims that God has an essential disposition to create" (43).

[687] *WJE* 8:435. That Crisp takes this to refer to creation is evident in Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, where he cites this passage in support of the claim that "the divine disposition to create is an 'original property' of the divine nature." Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 91.

[688] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 146. See also, "The divine disposition to create is an 'original property' of the divine nature" (44). McClymond shares Crisp's assessment of Edwards on this point, arguing that "Edwards's notion of the 'emanative disposition' within God implies that God *needed* to create a world. Because creation derives from a 'disposition' that Edwards calls 'an original property of his nature', it seems that God had no choice but to create a world." Michael J. McClymond, "Sinners in the Hands of a Virtuous God: Ethics and Divinity in Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 2.1 (2010): 19n59. McClymond points to others who corroborate this view such as Ellwood, Smith, Schafer, and Wilson-Kastner. So also Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality*, 90-93.

[689] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 58.

does God have the liberty of spontaneity, he also has the liberty of indifference, "according to which God is free provided he is able to act or refrain from acting in a particular choice."[690] Thus, in creating, God is free with a liberty of indifference, since he is also free *not* to create. It is with respect to God's liberty of indifference that Edwards departs from his theological tradition. For Edwards, not even God has liberty of indifference, because liberty of indifference is an incoherent and contradictory concept in itself.[691] Thus, according to Crisp, for Edwards God is only free with a liberty of spontaneity, and liberty of spontaneity is compatible with determinism and necessity. Edwards is thus a "global theological determinist."[692] He is a compatibilist all the way down, and thus, on Crisp's account of Edwards, creation's necessity doesn't compromise God's freedom and moral praiseworthiness.[693] However, according to Richard Muller and John Fisk, Edwards's account of the will constitutes a "parting of the ways" or a "turn" from his inherited theological tradition.[694]

A more serious problem raised by creation's necessity is with respect to divine aseity. As Crisp puts it, "if God is essentially such that he must create, then it begins to look like God is

[690] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 59.

[691] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 63. "Edwards thinks that no entity is free according to the liberty of indifference—God included."

[692] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 65. McClymond likewise argues, "With respect to God's freedom, it is worth noting that the deterministic position on human volition set forth in Edwards's Freedom of the Will assumes a compatibility between the responsible exercise of the will and the determination of the will by 'motives'. According to Edwards, God's goodness, although 'necessary', is nonetheless volitional and is praiseworthy. Hence it may be possible to say, in Edwardsean terms, that creation was 'necessary' and yet took place through a responsible and praiseworthy act of God." McClymond, "Sinners," 19n59.

[693] For further discussion of Edwards's view of the will, see Paul Ramsay's introduction in WJE 1:2-117; Joe Rigney, "Freedom of the Will," in *A Reader's Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy Kimble (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 131–152.

[694] For further reflections on Edwards's relation to Reformed thinking on the will, see Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 1.1 (2011): 3–22; Paul Helm, "Jonathan Edwards and the Parting of the Ways?," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.1 (2014): 42–60; Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of Will. In Response to Paul Helm," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 266–85; Paul Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 286–96; Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

dependent on the created order in some fashion after all."[695] Crisp notes that such a notion need not compromise God's metaphysical aseity; creation may be the "necessary product of the essential divine creativity" and yet God not be dependent for his continued existence on the creation. However, God's *psychological* aseity may still be threatened by his essential creativity.[696] This is precisely the argument that James Beilby makes with respect to Edwards's view of God's purpose in creation.

> If God's purpose in creation is to accomplish a task—bringing glory to himself—that he both desires and cannot accomplish without creation, it seems that God becomes dependent on creation to accomplish this task…the tension exists between aseity and the claim that God's purpose in creating was to bring glory to himself.[697]

Crisp argues that Edwards's words about dormant attributes do not compromise divine simplicity and the pure act account of God's nature because the distinction between dormant and exercised attributes is "merely conceptual." Because God is essentially creative, there are no actual dormant attributes, nor is there any real metaphysical possibility of there being dormant attributes, since God will and must create.[698] What's more, because of the eternal creation thesis, God has always eternally realized his essentially creative disposition, and thus, according to

[695] Crisp, *God and Creation*, 79.

[696] Crisp himself thinks Edwards maintains psychological aseity because God is not psychologically dependent on creation "as an end in itself." Because creation is a means to the ultimate end of glorifying God, and because of Edwards's wider philosophical commitments to idealism and occasionalism, Crisp believes that Edwards avoids compromising divine aseity. Additionally, Crisp argues that we must keep divine eternality in view when assessing Edwards's view of God as essentially creative. The "divine eternity component of [Edwards's] metaphysical account of the divine nature" (or P5) keeps God's essential creativity from undermining God as simple, pure act. See Crisp, *God and Creation*, 50–51.

[697] James Beilby, "Divine Aseity, Divine Freedom: A Conceptual Problem for Edwardsian-Calvinism," *JETS* 47.4 (2004): 649. See also Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality*, 90–93, though Bombaro does not think that Edwards's concept of dormant attributes compromises aseity.

[698] He likens the possibility of God failing to exercise his attributes in creation to saying, "if God were to refrain from exercising his omniscience for a moment then he might be said to be capable of forgetting who he was…Just as God cannot fail to be omniscient though we might speculate on whether God can lack omniscience, so also God cannot fail to exercise his disposition to create the world." See Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 98.

Crisp, Edwards's account does not violate his commitment to God as pure act.[699] Nevertheless, even the very concept of dormant attributes appears to pose problems to divine aseity.

In sum, according to some scholars, Edwards's view of the God-world relation raises particularly difficult questions about the Creator-creature distinction, creation's necessity, divine freedom, divine aseity, the status of dormant attributes, and God's relation to creation. In what follows, I hope to address a number of the issues raised in the previous summary by exploring Edwards's understanding of the God-world relation through the lens of his innovative taxonomy of attributes. In particular, I hope to show that, while Edwards does differ from the Reformed scholastic tradition at a few key points, much of his account of the God-world relation is consistent with and comprehensible in terms of that tradition.

8.3 The Reformed Scholastics on Necessity, Contingency, and Liberty of Indifference

Assessing Edwards's fidelity to the Reformed orthodox tradition on divine freedom requires a brief overview of this tradition. Muller has argued for Edwards's departure from the tradition by comparing him to Turretin, while Fisk has argued similarly based on a comparison to Adrian Heereboord. Thus, for simplicity's sake and since Edwards was familiar with the writings of these theologians, I will limit myself to them in establishing the backdrop for Edwards's thinking.

We begin with necessity. Turretin offers a number of distinctions on the question of necessity. He distinguishes between necessity in God and necessity in things. In God, we may speak of the absolute necessity of his nature, as well as the hypothetical necessity of his decree. Both are immutable: "the former is founded on the immutable nature of God; the latter on his

[699] Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 95. "According to Edwards, God has an eternal desire to create a world, and this desire is eternally realized" (96).

immutable will."[700] In things themselves, Turretin distinguishes physical and internal necessity on the part of secondary causes (as when fire necessarily burns) and necessity of coaction which arises from external principles acting violently. He further distinguishes a dependent hypothetical necessity concerning mutable and contingent things, which are necessary only in virtue of God's decree and resulting infallible foreknowledge.

Elsewhere Turretin divides necessity into six heads: (1) necessity of external coaction or compulsion, (2) internal, physical, and brute necessity (as when animals act by instinct or fire burns), (3) dependent, hypothetical necessity based on God's decree (such as creaturely existence), (4) rational necessity by which the will irresistibly follows the judgment of the practical intellect, (5) moral necessity, or slavery to good or bad habits, and (6) necessity of the consequence by which a thing, when it exists, cannot but exist.[701] The first two types (coactive necessity and brute necessity) are incompatible with free choice. However, the last four are not only consistent with free will, but in fact preserve and perfect it.[702]

Heereboord also distinguishes between various types of necessity.[703] God alone has independent necessity, which is the highest kind of necessity. Dependent definitional necessity refers to things that are true by definition or demonstration, such as "a human is a rational animal," or "a human is risible." This type of necessity depends upon God, who creates and establishes the essential attributes that make things what they are. A third type of necessity is a

[700] Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.4.2, 320.

[701] Turretin, *Institutes*, 10.2.4, 661–662.

[702] Turretin, *Institutes*, 10.2.6-10, 662–664. "Not every necessity contends with liberty, nor agrees with it. A certain extrinsic necessity destroys liberty; another agrees with it. A certain intrinsic crushes it and another perfects it. The necessity of coaction, which is extrinsic, is incompatible with liberty; but a hypothetical necessity, arising either from a decree of God or from the existence of the thing, conspires with it. Intrinsic necessity (arising from a physical and brute determination to one thing) takes away liberty; an intrinsic necessity (flowing from a rational determination of the will by the intellect) not only does not destroy liberty, but preserves and fosters it" (8.1.5, 569–570).

[703] Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 133–36.

dependent natural necessity by which a thing necessarily produces certain effects, from itself, on its own. This includes things like gravity, or the sun rising, or fire burning. While natural necessity is a permanent feature of a thing, God may stop and prevent the necessary actions, without any contradiction. Finally, there is dependent hypothetical necessity, in which there is an external reality creating the necessity of something that in itself is not necessary.[704]

Finally, the classic Reformed orthodox line distinguished between the necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*) and the necessity of the consequent thing (*necessitas consequentis*).[705] The former is a *de dicto* necessity which expresses a necessary connection between terms of a proposition. If Joe exists, then necessarily Joe exists. If I am standing, then necessarily I am standing. Necessity of the consequence implies nothing about the necessity of the individual terms themselves, and thus leaves room for contingence.[706] Necessity of the consequent thing, on the other hand, is a stronger *de re* form of necessity, in which the consequent thing itself is absolutely necessary.[707]

Turning to the notion of contingency, the basic definition is "that which can be otherwise than it is."[708] For Heereboord, contingency refers to something that is mutable and subject to

[704] Heereboord also distinguishes necessity by internality and externality. Internal necessities are either necessary by nature or by an intrinsic principle; in the former the negation of the principle implies a contradiction, whereas in the latter it does not. External necessities include hypothetical necessities, necessities from the supposition of efficient causes, necessities from the supposition of final causes, and necessities from the supposition of antecedents (such as the divine decrees or foreknowledge). See Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 136–38.

[705] See the discussion in Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 324–27.

[706] "The necessity of the consequence is the logical or present necessity that a thing must be what it is, although it also either could not be or could be otherwise. In other words, a necessity of the consequence indicates a genuine contingency." Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of Will. In Response to Paul Helm," 273.

[707] In his *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, Muller defines *necessitas consequentiae* as "a necessity brought about or conditioned by a previous contingent act or event so that the necessity itself arises out of a contingent circumstance; thus, conditional necessity." *Necessitas consequentis* is "the necessity of something that cannot be other than what it is, which is to say, a simple or absolute necessity." Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 200.

[708] Heereboord, as quoted by Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 143.

change. He rejects the notion that it merely refers to things that happen by chance or misfortune.[709] Turretin defines it as something that is able to be done or not done.[710] For Turretin, something may be contingent in two ways—either with respect to the first cause or to second causes. All created things are contingent with respect to first causes, since "God might not have created if he so willed." Created things which may or may not produce certain effects are contingent in the second sense.[711] Turretin is clear that, while God's decree does render future things certain (in that they will infallibly come to pass), God's decree does not override contingency.[712] Thus, it is important to consider things both in terms of their certainty and in terms of their mode of production. This distinction enables Turretin to speak of "future contingent things." Such future contingents may be "indeterminate with respect to us (who cannot see in which direction the free second cause is about to incline itself)" but future contingents are determinate with respect to God "to whom all future things appear as present."[713]

Finally, to the question of liberty, the Reformed orthodox distinguished between various notions of indifference in order to separate themselves from their Jesuit opponents. On the one hand, they conceived of freedom of choice in terms of faculty psychology, with distinct roles assigned to the intellect and the will. Significantly, they held that "there had to be a root indifference prior to the engagement of will and intellect, defined by the potency of the will to multiple effects and characterized by freedom of contradiction and contrariety."[714] On the other

[709] Fisk identifies a fivefold division in Heereboord's account of contingency. Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 142–48.

[710] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.12.21, 211.

[711] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.12.8, 208.

Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.12.23, 211.[712] "The infallibility and certainty of the event does not take away the nature of the contingency of things because things can happen necessarily as to the event and yet contingently as to the mode of production." Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.12.23, 211.

[713] Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.12.19, 211.

[714] Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition," 19–20.

hand, they distinguished this root of indifference from the liberty of indifference insisted upon by Roman Catholics like Molina. Whereas the Catholics and Arminians held to indifference in the compound sense, the Reformed held to indifference in the divided sense. Helm helpfully summarizes the difference.

> Indifference in the compound sense, that held by the Jesuits, may be expressed as: (1) given all the requisites for choosing A, John can choose either A or n-A, or B. The Reformed Orthodox deny indifference in the compound sense, but affirm it in the divided sense, which may be expressed as: (2) a person has a will which in itself can choose A or n-A or B, according to the judgement of the intellect.[715]

Significantly, on this view, the will follows the judgment of the intellect by virtue of an intrinsic, rational necessity. As Turretin says, "Since the will is a rational appetite, such is its nature that it must follow the last judgment of the practical intellect."[716]

But if the will always follows the last judgment of the intellect, what do the Reformed orthodox mean by indifference? Helm argues that their faculty psychology necessitated insisting on the indifference of the will in itself, so as to distinguish rational choices from instincts and reflexes. But the indifference of the will in itself, considered as a faculty, is not the same as the stronger notion that "the will is *always* so indifferent and undetermined that it can act or not act."[717] This stronger, Jesuit notion of indifference Turretin rejects. Once all of the requisites for acting have been posited—things such as the decree of God and his concourse, the judgment of the practical intellect, etc.—the will is no longer indifferent in the strong sense. "So Turretin, Voetius, and the Reformed Orthodox in general, by upholding indifference in the divided sense,

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[715] Helm, "Parting of the Ways," 46-47. For a fuller discussion of this distinction in Heereboord, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 107-131.

[716] Turretin, *Institutes*, 10.3.2, 663. It's noteworthy that this order is never reversed; the judgment of the intellect is never said to follow the will. Helm, "Parting of the Ways?," 47-48. See also Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," 295. "As far as Turretin is concerned, I can find no evidence of the view of interactivity between intellect and will, reciprocal action, that is. Rather the will is subordinate to the intellect in a rather pointed way, in a way that justifies Turretin saying the result is a case of rational necessity."

[717] Helm, "Parting of the Ways," 48.

have in mind the will *in itself*. They deny that once all the requisites for an action A are in place the will remains free to do B, which is freedom in the compound sense."[718]

8.4 Edwards on the Will

In light of this background, we turn now to explore Edwards's understanding of the will in general, before turning to his understanding of the divine will in particular. Edwards's mature and most extensive exposition of these matters may be found in his treatise *Freedom of the Will*. In Part 1 of this work, Edwards defines, relates, and distinguishes his key terms: *will*, *understanding*, *motive*, *liberty*, and *necessity*.[719] For example, we often speak as though the will makes choices. But strictly speaking, the will doesn't choose anything. *People* choose by means of the will. Or, more precisely, the mind chooses by means of the will. Though Edwards allows that we often speak improperly, for the sake of truth and accuracy, we must be clear that the will is not an agent which deliberates, plans, and chooses. Rather, *we* are agents who deliberate, plan, and choose, and we do so by means of the two faculties of the mind: the understanding and the will.[720]

The understanding is "that by which [the mind] is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and views and judges of things."[721] The will is "that by which the mind chooses anything … an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice."[722] The understanding perceives, discerns, and judges; the will prefers, likes, and chooses. What's more,

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[718] Helm, "Parting of the Ways," 49. On the differences between the Reformed orthodox and the Jesuits, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 149–66.

[719] For a fuller discussion of Edwards's view of the will, see Rigney in Introduction to Major Works. See also Fiering, *Edwards' Moral Thought*, 261–321; Editors introduction in *WJE* 1.

[720] When we say that "my will chooses," we must mean no more and no less than "I choose by means of my will." Likewise, when we say that "my mind perceives," this must simply be a way of saying, "I perceive by means of my understanding." The understanding and the will must not be set off from the self, as though they were distinct compartments or agents unto themselves.

[721] *WJE* 2:96.

[722] *WJE* 1:137.

acts of understanding and acts of will are not sequentially related; they occur together, as a part of the one unified act of the mind or soul. We may distinguish them, but we cannot separate them.[723]

So what sorts of things does the will do? All acts of the will—choosing, refusing, approving, disapproving, liking, disliking, embracing, rejecting, determining, directing, commanding, forbidding, inclining or being averse, a being pleased or displeased with—can be reduced to choosing. To will something is to choose it, to prefer it, to like it best, to be most pleased with it. "Thus an act of the will is commonly expressed by its pleasing a man to do thus or thus; and a man's doing as he wills, and doing as he pleases, are the same thing in common speech."[724]

Strictly speaking, acts of choosing are directed toward the "the next and immediate object of the will," not the more remote and indirect objects of the will.[725] Thus, if, while writing this

[723] It's worth noting that this "conception of the fundamental unity or coinherence of human capacities," which Edwards shares with John Locke, is a departure from most previous accounts of human psychology. Guelzo notes that previous Protestant thought tended to treat the different faculties of the mind (intellect, will, perception, judgment, etc.) as sub-departments in the mind that were arranged in some kind of hierarchy. In some, the intellect completed its action and then issued orders to the will to follow. In others, the will is given a veto power over the intellect's judgments. Allen Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, Jonathan Edwards Classic Studies (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 4. For Edwards's and Locke's alternative, see *WJE* 1:48–49. According to Muller, Edwards, like Locke, "evacuated the traditional distinction between intellect and will as separate faculties and the consequent distinction resident in the tradition between the acts of will and intellect in their conjoint act of choosing freely." Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition," 13. Instead, the will is simply identified as the mind in its act of choosing, just as the intellect or understanding is simply the mind in its act of perceiving. Helm tempers this difference by noting that Edwards can still speak of the "faculty of the will" and distinct acts of the intellect and will (e.g. volition). Helm, "Parting of the Ways," 57.

[724] *WJE* 1:139. Edwards believes that this aspect of his case ought to be unobjectionable. "I trust it will be allowed by all, that in every act of will there is an act of choice; that in every volition there is a preference, or a prevailing inclination of the soul, whereby the soul, at that instant, is out of a state of perfect indifference, with respect to the direct object of the volition" (140).

[725] This is a very important point for Edwards. "When I say, the will is as the greatest apparent good is, or (as I have explained it) that volition has always for its object the thing which appears most agreeable; it must be carefully observed, to avoid confusion and needless objection, that I speak of the direct and immediate object of the act of volition; and not some object that the act of will has not an immediate, but only an indirect and remote respect to. Many acts of volition have some remote relation to an object, that is different from the thing most immediately willed and chosen." *WJE* 1:143. "The choice of the mind never departs from that which, at that time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of that decision of the mind, appears most agreeable and pleasing, all things considered" *WJE* 1:147. My own impression is that some critics of Edwards's view fail to recognize this

chapter, I get hungry and decide to go in the other room to get a sandwich, what I am actually willing is a sequence of steps toward satisfying my hunger. While sitting here, the next and immediate object of the will is not "eat a sandwich." Rather, it is "push the chair back from the table," followed by "stand up," followed by "take a step," and so on. This sequence of steps is related; each of them is animated by the apparent good of satisfying my hunger by eating a sandwich. But strictly speaking, our choices are made in the present moment about the next and immediate object.[726]

If the will is that by which the mind chooses, why do we make the choices that we do? Edwards's answer is clear: the will is determined by the strongest motive as it appears to the mind. What is a motive? A motive is an apparent good—something that we regard as good or pleasing—that moves or excites the mind to volition. A motive may be simple or complex. It may be strong or weak. But fundamentally, a motive is simply something that is visible to the understanding and that we, in some measure, find to be agreeable to us. And, it is the strongest motive, as it appears to the mind, that determines the will. Or, to be more precise, "the will always is as the greatest apparent good."[727]

A number of factors influence the strength of the motive. First, there is the object itself and its circumstances—what it is, how difficult it is to obtain, how soon we can gratify our desire

important point. For example, see Hugh J. McCann, "Edwards on Free Will," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 37–42.

[726] In *The End For Which God Created the World*, Edwards distinguishes between subordinate and ultimate ends. An ultimate end is something that is valued for its own sake, whereas a subordinate end is valued not for its own sake, but only for the sake of some further end that it is a means of. In the case of getting a sandwich, the ultimate end—that which is gratifying in itself—is satisfying my hunger. All of the other steps leading up to it—getting up from the table, walking into the other room, etc—are subordinate ends. Nevertheless, even though you don't desire the intermediate steps for their own sake, they are always the next and immediate object of our will. Their value may come from the ultimate end of satisfying hunger, but we still must will them individually in a succession of steps on our way to that ultimate end. See *WJE* 8:406.

[727] *WJE* 1:142. Edwards prefers the latter way of expressing things, rather than saying that the strongest motive determines the will, "because an appearing most agreeable or pleasing to the mind, and the mind's preferring and choosing, seem hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct." *WJE* 1:144.

for it. Next, there is how we are viewing the object—how certain are we that it will make us happy; how vivid is our idea of the future pleasure we will have in attaining it. And finally, there is the sort of person we are—our natural inclinations and bents; our character as it has been shaped by education, example, and custom; the frame of mind that we are in at the moment of choice. The object itself, our view of the object, and our character—all of these combine to present a total picture to our mind, to give us a vision of the apparent good that we will have if we make this choice. And whatever appears to our mind as the greatest good is the strongest motive, and it is the strongest motive that determines our will. In fact, the connection is so tight that "an appearing most agreeable and pleasing to the mind, and the mind's preferring and choosing seem hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct."[728]

Stressing the variety of factors that contribute to the strength of the motive also clarifies something about the next and immediate object of our will. Strictly speaking, the next and immediate object of our will is some *action* on our part: getting up, walking, opening the fridge, getting out the peanut butter, etc. This is an important clarification, because, while we might be perfectly indifferent about two (almost) identical objects, we can never be perfectly indifferent with respect to our actions in relation to those objects. Imagine two apples sitting on the table, identical in size, shape, and color. We may, in a manner of speaking, be indifferent about the apples themselves, but we cannot be indifferent about grabbing one of them and not the other. If we choose to take and eat the one on the right, something will have made the motive that induced us toward that one stronger, whether it is as simple as the light falling on it in a different way, or our being right-handed.[729] Even in such seemingly minor choices, we are still acting according to the greatest apparent good, as determined by the totality of contributing factors.

[728] *WJE* 1:144-147.
[729] *WJE* 1:198-199

This brings us to the question of liberty and moral responsibility. For Edwards, a man is free when he can act as he wills, when can do as he pleases. However he came to have the desires he has, a man is free if nothing impedes his carrying out his desires.[730] In this way, Edwards brackets off the question of everything that influences a man before the moment of choice. Whatever biases he has, whatever external motives have influenced him, Edwards sets that aside and locates liberty in the power a man has to do as he pleases in a particular moment with respect to the direct and immediate object of his choice.[731] For Edwards, liberty is only a matter of freedom from constraint, coaction, and compulsion. To be forced to do something contrary to one's will (constraint), or to be prevented from doing according to one's will (restraint)—these are the only things contrary to an agent's liberty, and therefore his moral responsibility.[732] To summarize, a man can be held responsible for his actions (moral responsibility) when he is free to do what he wills (liberty).

Significantly, Edwards's definition of liberty and moral responsibility is compatible with a particular kind of necessity. Whereas in much of his discourse on the will Edwards attempts to

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[730] "The plain and obvious meaning of the words "freedom" and "liberty," in common speech, is power, opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills. And the contrary to liberty, whatever name we call that by, is a person's being hindered or unable to conduct as he will, or being necessitated to do otherwise." *WJE* 1:163. Note again that liberty, properly speaking, belongs to the person that chooses, and not the will itself. The will doesn't choose; the person chooses by means of his will. "For the will itself is not an agent that has a will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. That which has the power of volition or choice is the man or the soul, and not the power of volition itself. And he that has the liberty of doing according to his will, is the agent or doer who is possessed of the will; and not the will which he is possessed of" (163).

[731] "But one thing more I would observe concerning what is vulgarly called liberty; namely, that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice, is all that is meant by it; without taking into the meaning of the word, anything of the cause or original of that choice; or at all considering how the person came to have such a volition; whether it was caused by some external motive, or internal habitual bias; whether it was determined by some internal antecedent volition, or whether it happened without a cause; whether it was necessarily connected with something foregoing, or not connected. Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom" *WJE* 1:164. See the comments by Ramsey in *WJE* 1:11-13.

[732] *WJE* 1:164; By moral agent, Edwards means a person who can be called good or evil, who can be worthy of praise or blame, who can be held responsible for his actions. *WJE* 1:165.

adopt common rather than specialized definitions and notions, when it comes to the question of necessity, Edwards becomes more refined, focusing on what he calls metaphysical or philosophical necessity. Metaphysical or philosophical necessity is "the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition, which affirms something to be true."[733] It is a "certainty in the things themselves," which is then the foundation of the certainty of knowledge of them and grounds the infallibility of propositions concerning them. Edwards divides philosophical necessity into three kinds. First, something is necessary by nature when a subject and a predicate have a full and fixed connection in and of themselves. Thus, God's existence and attributes are necessary by nature, as are certain metaphysical and mathematical truths.[734] Second, something becomes necessary once it has occurred. "The existence of whatever is already come to pass, is now become necessary."[735] Finally, something may be consequentially necessary owing to a fixed and certain connection to anything in the first two categories. "Things which are perfectly connected with other things that are necessary, are necessary themselves, by a necessity of consequence."[736] Future necessities are only necessary in this final sense, because future things which do not exist now cannot be necessary in themselves, nor have they already come to pass. It is this final kind of necessity, therefore, that "especially belongs to controversies about the acts of the will."[737]

Edwards further distinguishes between moral necessity on the one hand, and natural necessity on the other. Natural necessity is the necessity that men are under through force of natural causes. This includes things like the force of gravity, feeling pain when we are wounded,

[733] *WJE* 1:152.
[734] This type of necessity corresponds to Turretin's absolute necessity.
[735] *WJE* 1:153.
[736] *WJE* 1:153.
[737] *WJE* 1:154. Edwards further notes that the terms impossible and impossibility are explained by these categories, since impossibility is simply negative necessity (155).

and seeing sights when our eyes are opened and working properly, as well as assent to basic and obvious propositions (like 2+2=4 or that black is not white). Moral necessity is necessity arising from moral causes such as habits and dispositions of the heart. This distinction is closely related to the parallel distinction between moral inability and natural inability. We are naturally unable to do something when we can't do it if we will, because something *outside* of the will impedes us, such as a defect in the understanding, or the body, or an external object. On the other hand, we are morally unable to do something because of a lack of inclination or a desire, or because of the strength of a contrary inclination or desire. In other words, we are morally unable to do something when we *can't* do it because we don't *want* to do it.

Why do these distinctions matter? Because while natural necessity and natural inability would threaten our liberty and moral responsibility, moral necessity and moral inability do not. If I can't do what I will because of some external obstacle, then I am not free to do it, nor can I be held morally responsible for failing to do it. But if I can't do something because I don't want to, then, while I am morally unable to do that thing, I can still be held responsible for failing to do it.[738]

Turning to the notion of contingence, Edwards contends that the original meaning of the term refers to things that "come to pass by chance or accident," which simply means that its antecedents and causes are not discerned. Thus, anything that happens without our foreknowledge or beyond our design and scope is said to be contingent or accidental. Beyond this original meaning, Edwards also argues that contingence is often used to refer to something

[738] Edwards notes that both God and the incarnate Christ are morally unable to sin, and yet are still morally praiseworthy for their virtue. *WJE* 13:217. See Marco Barone, "The Relationship between God's Nature, God's Image in Man, and Freedom in the Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8.1 (2018): 44-45.

"which has absolutely no previous ground or reason."[739] Contingence in this sense means causelessness, and Edwards associates this meaning with his Arminian opponents.[740]

Finally, with respect to liberty of indifference, Edwards associates all forms of indifference with Arminianism, and rejects it wholesale as incoherent. Edwards admits that the mind may be indifferent about many things prior to choosing. But his opponents' claim is stronger; they claim that the will is not only indifferent *before* it chooses, but also is indifferent *when* it chooses. Any preference that we have about our choice arises as a consequence of our choice. But this is absurd, since "the very act of choosing one thing rather than another, is preferring that thing."[741] Edwards rejects this out of hand.

But what of indifference in the divided sense, as put forward by Turretin? While Edwards does not address the question directly, in his discussion of the liberty of indifference, he does refer to some "refiners" who posit a distinction that he finds incomprehensible. Given that this distinction is "newly invented," it likely cannot refer to that of the Reformed orthodox. However, the distinction—between the indifference of the will's inclination and the indifference of the soul's power of willing—bears some affinity to the divided and compound sense of indifference surveyed by Helm.

> Now lest some should suppose that I don't understand those that place liberty in indifference, or should charge me with misrepresenting their opinion, I would signify, that I am sensible, there are some, who when they talk of the liberty of the will as consisting in indifference, express themselves as though they would not be understood of the indifference of the inclination or tendency of the will, but of, I know not what,

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[739] *WJE* 1:155

[740] It's important to note that Edwards's definition of contingence differs from others in the Reformed orthodox tradition.

[741] *WJE* 1:197. Edwards notes that some of his opponents, such as Watts, are inconsistent at this point, since they regularly lapse into the same language Edwards uses about doing as we please. But while indifference can precede doing as we please, it cannot exist at the same time. "To say that when it is indifferent, it can do as it pleases, is to say that it can follow its pleasure, when it has not pleasure to follow." *WJE* 1:198. Later, Edwards likens this to motion and rest. "Choice and preference can no more be in a state of indifference, than motion can be in a state of rest…Motion may be the next moment after rest; but can't coexist with it, in *any*, even the *least* part of it." *WJE* 1:207.

> indifference of the soul's power of willing; or that the will, with respect to its power or ability to choose, is indifferent, can go either way indifferently, either to the right hand or left, either act or forbear to act, one as well as the other.[742]

The "indifference of the soul as to its power or ability of willing" corresponds to the indifference in the divided sense affirmed by Turretin, which posits that the will in itself (abstractly and absolutely considered) can choose A or not A. The "soul's indifference as to the preference or choice itself" corresponds to the compound indifference insisted on by Molina and the Arminians, which posits that the soul, even with all of the requisites in place, has at the moment of choice an absolute and essential indifference and ability to choose A or not A. With respect to this proposed distinction, Edwards questions whether such refiners "distinctly know their own meaning" and "whether they don't deceive themselves in imagining that they have any distinct meaning at all."[743]

Taking stock of Edwards's view of will, choice, liberty, and necessity, the following picture emerges. Apparent goods are presented to the mind, which perceives them by the understanding. These apparent goods excite the will, and thus have the force of motives. The strongest motive—as determined by all contributing factors such as the object itself, the manner of the mind's view of the object, and the temper and state of the mind itself—determines the will, since the will is always as the greatest apparent good. The mind may have remote and indirect goods in view in its willing, but acts of choosing always pertain to the next and immediate objects of the will, and these immediate objects always involve our actions in relation to objects, and not merely the objects themselves. The liberty necessary for moral responsibility is simply the liberty of spontaneity, or the freedom from constraint, restraint, compulsion, and coaction. We are free when we can do as we will. This type of freedom is consistent with certain kinds of

[742] *WJE* 1:204.
[743] *WJE* 1:204.

philosophical necessity; specifically it is consistent with moral necessity and the corresponding moral inability, even as natural necessity and natural inability would compromise one's liberty and therefore responsibility as a moral agent. Liberty of indifference is an incoherent notion, since while we may be indifferent about certain objects abstractly considered, we are never perfectly indifferent about our actions in relation to those objects. With this view of the will, we are now prepared to reflect on Edwards's application of it to God.

8.5 Edwards on Divine Freedom

From early in his ministry, Edwards believed that many of God's actions are both necessary and free. "God himself does many things necessarily that yet he does freely. He necessarily acts justly, and he freely acts justly: for he does it of his own free choice, according to the complacency of his own will."[744] The compatibility of God's freedom and necessity is used to ground the compatibility of man's freedom in light of the necessity of God's decree.

> God may order that a thing shall certainly be done, so that it is impossible but that the thing should come to pass, and yet not force the doing. The certainty and necessity of events is very consistent with the liberty of action. Necessity and liberty ben't contradictory terms, though compulsion and liberty are. A thing may be certain and necessary from all eternity, as to the futurity of it, and the action be done with as much freedom and liberty as ever anything was done in the world.[745]

Edwards's view of the necessity of the future follows from the three types of philosophical necessity he set forth in *Freedom of the Will*. In his Controversies notebook, he notes that some things exist in their own nature, and some things do not. God, as the First Being,

[744] *WJE* 14:169.

[745] *WJE* 14:169. Citing the example of Judas, whose betrayal of Jesus was determined by God and yet freely willed, Edwards articulates the same basic position that we surveyed in the previous section. "Necessity is not opposed to liberty, but to contingency, to the accidentalness of a thing. And compulsion is opposed to liberty. Liberty don't consist in an exact indifference to an action, so that when it is done it shall be done merely accidentally; but it consists in acting according to one's own choice, to the counsel of our own will. And he that acts according to his own choice, acts freely, however God has determined that choice; and it was absolutely certain from all eternity that the man should make such a choice" (168).

"exists necessarily and of himself." However, in its own nature, creation is not necessary, but only possible. Thus the proposition that "such a thing shall be" is not "in its own nature a necessary truth." Instead, it has a kind of suppositional or hypothetical necessity owing to God's decree. God, by his decree, moves something "out of a state of mere possibility, into a state of futurition," which makes it certainly future.[746] The picture is essentially the same as that of Ames and Turretin, with God's decree intervening between creation considered in a state of mere possibility (expressed in terms of divine ideas or of God's absolute power) and creation considered as actually intended (expressed in terms of exemplars and God's ordained power).[747]

Given that God's decree moves things from a state of mere possibility to a state of futurition, the question is whether God could have refrained from decreeing and creating. In discussing the free and voluntary agreement among the members of the Trinity, Edwards affirms that it is up to God's pleasure "whether there should be any creation, and so whether any such thing as God's declarative glory."[748] Only God's pleasure determines that there will be any creation at all. However, his most extended treatment of the question comes in *Freedom of the Will*, Part 4, in his engagement with Isaac Watts. Watts claimed that those who reject the self-determining power in the will and the absolute liberty of indifference as incoherent must apply their notions to God as well as creatures. And if they do, they effectively take away the glory of God's freedom, making him "a sort of almighty minister of fate" along the lines of Hobbes's mechanical necessity.[749] It's at this point that Edwards notes the difficulty of exploring the nature

[746] *WJE* 27:5. For a discussion of the roots of this distinction in the writings of Stapfer, see Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 256–63.

[747] Fisk identifies the same pattern in Heereboord. "Heereboord comments on how God knows possible states of affairs of existence and on the important role of the divine will in 'translating' possibles 'out of a state of possibility' into a 'state of actuality.' A twofold conceptual plane underlies the scheme of Heereboord, which is significant for attributing the crucial role to the divine will, which structurally is located between the planes, and transfers, as it were, possibles from one state to another." Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 183.

[748] *WJE* 25:147.

[749] *WJE* 1:375, quoting Watts, *Essay on the Freedom of Will in God and in the Creature*, 85–86.

of the incomprehensible Deity and "the modes of the action and operation of the powers of the divine mind."[750] He notes that "we are obliged to conceive of some things in God as consequent and dependent on others, and of some things pertaining to the divine nature and will as the foundation of others."[751] In particular, he claims the following, according to our way of conceiving:

1. In the order of nature, God's knowledge and holiness are prior to his happiness.

2. The perfection of his understanding is the foundation of his wise purposes and decrees.

3. The holiness of his nature is the cause and reason of his holy determinations.[752]

With respect to the last two, the pattern appears to be that his nature (perfect knowledge and holiness) grounds his external actions (wise decrees and holy determinations). Nevertheless, this ordering is according to human conception, and is not a strictly proper representation of the self-existent, simple, immutable, and absolute God.

So, humanly speaking, what may we say about the necessity of God's will? God's will is necessarily determined in all things by what he deems fittest and best. According to Edwards, there is no meanness or disadvantage in God's being such that he always chooses what is wisest and best. Nor does such a moral necessity derogate from his absolute sovereignty. God's sovereignty consists in four elements: 1) his infinite power whereby he is *able* to do all that he pleases; 2) his supreme authority, by which he has the perfect *right* to do what he wills, without any subjection to a superior authority; 3) his supreme and independent *will*, which is not determined by anything outside of himself, but instead is "determined by his own counsel;" and 4) his supreme, perfect, and independent *wisdom*, which determines his will. In fact, the glory of

[750] *WJE* 1:376. See chapter 1.
[751] *WJE* 1:376.
[752] *WJE* 1:376.

his sovereignty is that "his will is determined by his own infinite, all-sufficient wisdom in everything."[753] Thus, just as in creatures the will is always as the greatest apparent good, so the divine will is always as the greatest apparent good. The difference is that, for God, the greatest *apparent* good is also always the greatest *actual* good, owing to the perfection and all-sufficiency of his wisdom and understanding, and the holiness of his nature. What's more, whereas the motives of creatures come in some respect from outside, God is not affected by anything external to himself. Whereas we discover apparent goods outside of ourselves and thus are moved to act, God never discovers, since there is nothing outside of himself that he does not determine or make.

In making his case, Edwards draws a comparison between the necessity of God's existence and the necessity of God's will. As the former is no defect, neither is the latter. Significantly, however, Edwards equates necessarily acting "holily and wisely in the highest degree" with doing that which in every case is "above all other things wisest and best." This equation implies that in every case, there is one singular choice which is better than all others, and that God necessarily recognizes and selects it.

Edwards highlights the inconsistency of Watts, who at times praises God for always acting according to the superior fitness of things (whenever there is such a thing), and at times suggests that the scheme that makes the will follow the understanding which follows the appearance of things is contrary to all vice and virtue. Watts seeks to reserve God's acting according to superior fitness to only certain circumstances; Edwards insists that, if it is praiseworthy for God to *sometimes* act according to superior fitness, then it is *always*

[753] *WJE* 1:380.

praiseworthy for him to do so, and that such moral necessity in no way detracts from "God's freedom, independence, absolute supremacy."[754]

Thus, the real disagreement between Watts and Edwards is "*whether it be so indeed,* that in all the various possible things which are in God's view, and may be considered as capable objects of his choice, there is not evermore a preferableness in one thing above another."[755] Watts denies this, claiming that in many cases, there is a perfect indifference and equality as to fitness. Edwards, however, notes that, if there are actually *different* objects in view, then it is impossible for them to be "without difference," and thus for God to be "indifferent" to them.[756] Thus, we cannot posit distinct objects that don't have something distinguishing them, whether it be location, time, or circumstances. And even if God is perfectly indifferent about the objects in themselves, he is not indifferent about his actions in relation to them. If he chooses to place an atom here and not there, then he has a reason, and this reason will be in accordance with infinite wisdom, and thus his will with respect to the atom will be determined by what he sees to be fittest and best.[757]

8.6 Edwards on Fitness and Decency

Edwards's insistence that God always acts according to what is fittest and best raises the question of his understanding of fitness as applied to God. In *End of Creation*, he frequently uses

[754] *WJE* 1:383. Barone summarizes Edwards on the compatibility of moral necessity and God's freedom, "The theologian says that if we consistently assume the objection above for all moral agents, then that would mean that God, who is a moral agent, is not worthy of praise. In fact, God is morally necessitated to act holily, and the Godhead cannot do otherwise. God is morally necessitated to act according to his perfectly holy and righteous nature, and the divine Being cannot act otherwise. For example, God cannot sin, nor the Almighty can even consider to sin. Does that mean that, since the divine nature cannot act otherwise, God is not worthy to be praised?" Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 44.

[755] *WJE* 1:384.

[756] Edwards thus argues for an identity of indiscernibles. A difference that makes no difference is no difference. See Ramsay's discussion in the Editor's Introduction to *Freedom of the Will* in *WJE* 1:112-117.

[757] For further discussion of Edwards's engagement with Watts, see Barone, "Relationship between God's Nature," 46–50; Ramsay, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 1:89–118.

the language of "fit" and "proper" as he explores what reason dictates concerning God's end in creation. Consider the following statements about four possible candidates for God's original ultimate end (italics added).

> It seems a thing in itself *fit, proper and desirable* that the glorious attributes of God, which consist in a sufficiency to certain acts and effects, *should* be exerted in the production of such effects as might manifest the infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, etc., which are in God.[758]
>
> It seems to be a thing in itself *fit and desirable*, that the glorious perfections of God *should* be known, and the operations and expressions of them seen by other beings besides himself.[759]
>
> As it is a thing *valuable and desirable* in itself that God's glory *should* be seen and known, so when known, it seems equally *reasonable and fit*, it *should* be valued and esteemed, loved and delighted in, answerably to its dignity.[760]
>
> As there is an infinite fullness of all possible good in God, a fullness of every perfection, of all excellency and beauty, and of infinite happiness. And as this fullness is capable of communication or emanation ad extra; so it seems a thing *amiable and valuable* in itself that it *should* be communicated or flow forth, that this infinite fountain of good *should* send forth abundant streams, that this infinite fountain of light *should*, diffusing its excellent fullness, pour forth light all around…Thus it is *fit*, since there is an infinite fountain of light and knowledge, that this light *should* shine forth in beams of communicated knowledge and understanding: and as there is an infinite fountain of holiness, moral excellence and beauty, so it *should* flow out in communicated holiness.[761]

Notice that fitness is related to propriety, desirability, reasonableness, amiability, as well as carrying some notion of requirement (as evidenced by the repeated use of the word "should"). In fact, Edwards claims that the moral rectitude of God's heart consists "in paying the respect or regard of the heart which is due, or which fitness and suitableness *requires*.[762] Edwards does say in *End of Creation* that he will not enter into "any tedious metaphysical inquiries wherein fitness,

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[758] *WJE* 8:428–429.
[759] *WJE* 8:430–431.
[760] *WJE* 8:432.
[761] *WJE* 8:432–433.
[762] *WJE* 8:422.

amiableness, or valuableness consists."[763] However, reading his language in *End of Creation* in light of his use of fitness and necessity elsewhere in his writings, we are able to piece together a fuller understanding of his view of fitness.

8.6.1 Miscellany 1062 and What Decency Requires

Miscellany 1062 is an extended reflection on the economy of the Trinity and the covenant of redemption.[764] The second half of the entry is devoted to showing that the covenant of redemption is an entirely distinct establishment from the economic ordering of the divine persons for external works, which is prior to and the ground of the covenant of redemption. However, the first half of the entry not only establishes fruitful patterns for understanding Edwards's view of the God-world relation, it also includes an important discussion of God's relation to what fitness or decency requires. Much of the content appears in abbreviated form in the 1746 sermon "Of God the Father." In what follows, I will exposit Miscellany 1062 and include the relevant sections from the sermon in the footnotes.

Edwards begins with a word of caution about "fixing uncertain determinations in things of so high a nature."[765] Furthermore, throughout the entry he repeatedly speaks in terms of what "must be conceived" in these matters, thus highlighting that the entire discussion is oriented by human conception, according to our way of conceiving of God. As we saw in the discussion of the divine decrees, it is important to understand the sequencing of God's acts in terms of logical, rather than temporal, priority.

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[763] *WJE* 8:428.

[764] For discussions of this Miscellany, see Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 51–55; Christina Larsen, "Jonathan Edwards and Eternal Generation," in *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 212–17; William Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 73–78.

[765] *WJE* 20:430.

Edwards's discussion of the economic Trinity begins with a clear affirmation of "a subordination of the persons of the Trinity, in their actings with respect to the creature," with the Father as the Head of the Trinity, and the Son under him, and the Spirit under them both.[766] This economic subordination applies particularly in the affair of man's redemption.[767] Alongside this affirmation of economic subordination, Edwards next places the fact of the personal equality of the persons of the Trinity with each other. As we saw in the previous section, "the persons of the Trinity are not inferior one to another in glory and excellency of nature."[768] There is "a priority of subsistence" because the Son is begotten from the Father, and is therefore derived from and dependent upon the Father in terms of his subsistence. The Son is from the Father, and therefore the Father is prior to the Son, but this is a priority without superiority on the part of the Father and a dependence without inferiority of Deity on the part of the Son.

The complete equality of the persons therefore entails that the economic subordination of the Son to the Father and the Spirit to them both is not a "natural subjection," which would imply "an obligation to compliance and conformity to another as a superior…or an obligation to conformity to another's will." As the processions of the persons is a "necessary proceeding" as opposed to a voluntary one, it "infers no proper subjection of one to the will of another" and thus, we must not conceive the economic subordination to be a natural subjection.[769]

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[766] *WJE* 20:430.

[767] In his sermon "Of God the Father," Edwards explains Paul's claim in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that "the head of Christ is God" as follows, "he in the affair of our redemption acts as the head of the persons of the Trinity, and so the head of Christ. Christ, though in his divine nature be equal to him, yet in the office of a mediator acts under the Father as being appointed and sent by him, as one in subjection to him and dependent on him." *WJE* 25:144.

[768] *WJE* 20:430. "[All] are equal in their eternal glory; [they are] therefore equally worthy to be glorified." *WJE* 25:145.

[769] In "Of God the Father," Edwards answers the question of how there comes to be a subordination of the persons given their natural equality. "'Tis not because one person of the Trinity is by nature above another: there is no such thing as a natural superiority. This appears because all have the same divine essence, perfection, and so the same glory. [There is] no proper dependence. Independence is an essential property of the divine nature, [and so there is] no natural subjection. Thus the Son of God is not by nature in any subjection to the Father. By nature [he is] under no obligation." *WJE* 25:147.

Instead, we must conceive that the economic subordination is voluntary, "established by mutual free agreement."[770] According to Edwards, the persons of the Trinity of their own will have "as it were formed themselves into a society for carrying on the great design of glorifying the Deity and communicating its fullness."[771] This voluntary, free agreement thereby establishes "a certain economy and order of acting." However, this establishment, while voluntary, is not merely arbitrary, being based on the mere pleasure of the members, nor is it simply a matter of convenience in fitting means to a certain end. Instead, "there is a natural decency or fitness in that order and economy."[772] As Edwards says, "'Tis fit that the order of the acting of the persons of the Trinity should be agreeable to the order of their subsisting."[773] In other words, the economy follows the subsistences; the missions follow the processions.[774] Moreover, in making this argument, Edwards establishes a principle that will be vital for understanding his view of the

[770] *WJE* 20:431. "It was from the mutual agreement of the persons [of the Trinity]. This divine society, established in this order by the eternal agreement, agreed to act in this order in all things appertaining to the glory of the Godhead. 'Tis not from the necessity of God's nature, not from any natural subordination, but 'tis the fruit of the will and pleasure of the persons of the Trinity. This is evident because [our redemption] and all affairs in which they thus act in a subordination one to another are determined by God's pleasure: whether there should be any creation, and so whether any such thing as God's declarative glory." *WJE* 25:147.

In Miscellany 993, Edwards writes that God's decrees are contained in the covenant of redemption, which is in a manner of speaking a "mutual consultation and covenant," which is represented to us as "a determination by consultation, 'Come, let us make man' (Gen. 1.26), etc." *WJE* 20:323.

Larsen notes that "it is only because these subordinations are freely willed that Edwards finds them truly fitting." Larsen, "Eternal Generation," 217.

[771] *WJE* 20:431. See also *WJE* 25:146.

[772] In Miscellany 647 while discussing the qualifications for justification, Edwards distinguishes between two types of fitness, one moral and one natural. "A person is morally fit for a state, when by his excellency or odiousness his excellency or odiousness commends him to it." A natural fitness doesn't take into account a person's moral excellency, but instead looks at the agreeableness between a person and the state, or the effects and consequences of the person being placed in such estate. In other words, natural excellency has record for something outside of the person's moral qualities—some relation to other things, whether capacities, effects, consequences. *WJE* 23:381. For a discussion of Edwards's view of natural and moral fitness, see Fiering, *Edwards' Moral Thought*, 89–93.

[773] *WJE* 20:431. "Though it be from the free and voluntary agreement [of the persons of the Trinity], yet 'tis not arbitrary in such a sense as to exclude any fitness or wisdom appearing in such an established order of acting, agreeable to the order of subsisting." *WJE* 25:147.

[774] Edwards elaborates thusly, "that as the Father is first in the order of subsisting, so he should be first in the order of acting; that as the other two persons are from the Father in their subsistence, and as to their subsistence naturally originated from him and dependent on him, so that, in all that they act, they should originate from him, act from him and in a dependence on him; that as the Father, with respect to the subsistences, is the fountain of the Deity, wholly and entirely so, so he should be the fountain in all the acts of the Deity." *WJE* 20:431.

God-world relation and the question of creation's necessity. "Though it is not proper to say decency *obliges* the persons of the Trinity to come into this order and economy, yet it may be said that decency requires it."[775] Decency, or fitness, or propriety *requires*, but does not *oblige* the ordering of the persons in this manner.[776] The difference appears to be that, for Edwards, "oblige" carries the notion of subjection to an external standard, a conformity to another as a superior, whereas "require" suggests a kind of descriptive conformity that falls under the category of fitness and propriety.[777] The order of subsistences acts as a kind of pattern or model, which the order of acting follows and reflects. Thus, for Edwards, decency or fitness stands between conformity to a superior standard on the one hand, and mere arbitrary establishment on the other.[778]

Finally, Edwards argues that the economic ordering of the persons in their actions *ad extra* is distinct from and prior to the covenant of redemption itself.[779] The economic ordering, which includes a free, voluntary, and economic subordination of the Son to the Father and the Spirit to them both, is oriented to God's *general* determination to glorify and communicate himself, whereas the covenant of redemption is the *particular method* chosen by divine wisdom

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[775] *WJE* 20:431.

[776] Larsen recognizes the importance of fitness in linking the internal processions and external missions. Larsen, "Eternal Generation," 212–17.

[777] In Miscellany 831, Edwards says that "'tis moral fitness only, and not natural, that ever more brings what we call obligation." *WJE* 18:544.

[778] Edwards makes a similar argument about the fitness of the representations of the Holy Spirit in Scripture (breath, water, oil, wind, fire) and the identification of the Spirit as the love of God in Miscellany 1065. "The representation would be very unnatural if we should speak of understanding, wisdom, or idea as breathed forth, poured out, shed abroad, burning, blowing, etc." These names and similitudes are not adapted to the Holy Spirit by "an arbitrary constitution or agreement of the persons of the Trinity," but instead these names are suited to the Holy Spirit according to the nature of things. *WJE* 20:445.

[779] So Larsen, "Eternal Generation," 213. In this Edwards is following Mastricht. Neele writes, "Where the 'economic' Trinity usually refers to the manifestation of the divine activity *ad extra*, Mastricht includes in his understanding of the term 'economy' the interaction, deliberation, and organization of the Persons of the Trinity prior to the work of redemption." Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht: Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety*, vol. 35 of *Brill's Series in Church History* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 248. Edwards explicitly identifies his dependence on Mastricht for his understanding of the economic Trinity in Miscellany 432, citing Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 2.24.11.

which will gratify this prior end. God's determination to glorify himself "must be conceived as flowing from God's nature," whereas establishing the particular means for glorifying himself is the result of divine wisdom "intervening" and pitching upon a wonderful and convenient method for gratifying God's natural inclination.[780] God's natural inclination to glorify himself is exercised first, and then wisdom suggests a particular, excellent method for accomplishing this end. "Therefore this particular invention of wisdom, of God's glorifying and communicating himself by the redemption of a certain number of fallen inhabitants of this globe of earth, is a thing diverse from God's natural inclination to glorify and communicate himself in general, and superadded to it or subservient to it."[781]

The remainder of the entry consists of Edwards elaborating on and demonstrating this distinction through appeals to Scripture. For our purposes, the important aspect is to note the three step "movement" implied in Edwards's account. First, there is God himself in his absolute triune life, in which there is distinction of personal glory with complete equality. The processions of the Godhead are necessary processions, and thus all subjection and subordination is ruled out. There is order of subsistence without subordination of persons. What's more, at this point God has a natural and necessary disposition to glorify and communicate himself. Second, God's determination to glorify and communicate himself leads the persons of the Trinity to freely order themselves, as it were, into a society to accomplish this general task. This economic ordering for the purposes of glorifying the Deity and communicating its fullness is voluntary and free without being merely arbitrary. Instead, fitness requires (but does not oblige) that the order of acting

[780] In speaking of God's general determination to glorify himself, Edwards is similar to Turretin who argued that God wills himself and his own glory with an absolute (or natural) necessity. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.V. With respect to creation, whereas Turretin speaks in the language of contingency and liberty of indifference, Edwards posits the covenant of redemption as a wonderful, convenient, and decent method for accomplishing God's general and necessary end.

[781] *WJE* 20:432.

follow the order of subsisting. The external missions of the persons must follow the internal processions of the persons. But importantly, at this point in Edwards's account, the mission of God is only a general one—a determination to glorify himself *ad extra*. The third and final step occurs when wisdom intervenes to offer and establish a particular method for accomplishing this general purpose. The particular method added is the covenant of redemption, whereby the persons of the Trinity agree to redeem a certain number of the fallen inhabitants of the earth. This is a "particular, new agreement" which brings new and particular responsibilities to the relevant persons. We will return to this three step "movement"—from the immanent Trinity to the general economic Trinity to the particular covenant of redemption—in our conclusion.

8.6.2 Fitness in End of Creation

In an earlier chapter we noted that Edwards makes the following equations: the principle of proportionate regard = valuing things according to their value = the moral rectitude of God's heart = God's valuing and loving himself infinitely and supremely = God's holiness = the Holy Spirit. Significantly, Edwards also equates the principle of proportionate regard to God doing what "fitness or suitableness requires."[782] This language precisely parallels the language of "decency requires" in Miscellany 1062. Just as decency requires (but does not oblige) the external missions of the persons of the Trinity to follow and reflect the internal processions of the persons, so also God acts according to the principle of proportionate regard. In explaining how God relates to the principle of proportionate regard, Edwards illustrates the difference between fitness or decency *requiring* and fitness or decency *obliging*.

[782] *WJE* 8:422.

To do so, Edwards proposes a third arbiter, a disinterested and impartial being of perfect wisdom and rectitude, neither Creator nor creature, to determine what is fit for God to do.[783] What regard does fitness require to be shown in the kingdom of existence? This third arbiter would determine that the degree of regard should be in proportion to the combination of the proportion of existence and proportion of excellence. In other words, for any being, combine existence and excellence, greatness and goodness, together, and the degree of regard should be in proportion to the sum. Thus, the whole system should receive greater regard than any individual. And, more importantly, the Creator should be weighed in the balance with the creation in order to determine their relative worth and therefore the regard owed them. In that case, creation weighs practically nothing, being no more than dust on the scales (with an allusion to Isaiah 40:15-17). And the infinite Creator, who has all possible existence, perfection, and excellence is due all possible regard. The arbiter would thus conclude that all beings, all intelligence, must regard God as most valuable.

Having made his point, Edwards denies the possibility of such a third arbiter, but affirms the conclusions of the impossible supposition on the grounds that God possesses the requisite wisdom and rectitude in himself.[784] It is proper for God to act according to the greatest fitness, and he knows what the greatness fitness is with the same clarity that he would have were it a distinct person dictating to him. He possesses perfect discernment and rectitude. He is the supreme arbiter, and thus, he may state all rules and measures. The fact that he is an interested party in the evaluation does not matter, since interest only obscures justice when it blinds and misleads, which it cannot in the case of God. Thus God *states* the rules of order in this affair (to us) *according to* what fitness requires.

[783] On the third arbiter, see Schultz, "Supreme Self-Regard," 100–102.
[784] *WJE* 8:425.

In essence, Edwards has posited one horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, supposing that God must subordinate himself to some external standard of wisdom, rectitude, and fitness.[785] Having done so, he then withdraws from the dilemma by placing the perfect wisdom, rectitude, and fitness within God, and not external to him. If it were external, fitness would *obligate* God to love himself supremely.[786] As it is, fitness merely *requires* him to do so. Put another way, God is not *subordinate* to the principle of proportionate regard, as though it were an external standard. Nevertheless, he does operate *according* to the principle. It is *descriptive* with respect to him, not *prescriptive*.[787]

In positing a third arbiter of perfect wisdom and rectitude, it is likely that Edwards is operating with a trinitarian sub-current. Recall that, in Edwards's psychological account of the Trinity, God's wisdom simply is the Son and his moral rectitude simply is the Holy Spirit. So Edwards is, in essence, positing the persons of the Trinity as though they were outside of God, evaluating him. He then restores God's wisdom and rectitude to his own being, and, given his commitment to the simplicity maxim ("everything that is in God is God") as applied to God's

[785] On the relationship between Edwards's argumentation and the Euthyphro dilemma, see Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation: An Exposition and Defense," 248–255.

[786] This is McClymond's understanding of Edwards's view of God's relationship to the principle of proportionate regard. "It is noteworthy that Edwards applies this principle [i.e. of proportionate regard] to the Creator as well as creatures. God, no less than human beings, is *ethically bound* to take into account and respect the inherent worth of each of the entities he considers. The 'principle of proportionate regard' gives Edwards permission to indulge in what might otherwise seem empty speculation regarding God's intentions in creating. . . . Just as God in creating is *bound* to give highest regard to what is highest in "worth," so it is with creatures as well, who are *morally bound* to the principle of "benevolence to Being in general." Michael J. McClymond, "Sinners in the Hands of a Virtuous God: Ethics and Divinity in Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 2.1 (2010): 7.

[787] So Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation: An Exposition and Defense," 260-264. "Edwards does not advocate that the normative principle of proportionate regard obligates God." Instead, Edwards applies the principle "descriptively," as "a pattern of behavior" (260). "God's actions are in accord with—though not in submission to—proportionate regard" (264). Again, "According to Edwards, God does value things according to their value, but not in submission to or compliance with an 'external' moral rule or by application of an 'external' standard. Rather, God's showing proportionate regard is an aspect of his holiness, which is his infinite love and value for himself; the heart of God's Trinitarian nature." Schultz, "Supreme Self-Regard," 94.

real attributes (that is, the persons of the Godhead), effectively identifies the principle of proportionate with God himself.[788]

8.7 Incomprehensible Mysteries

Before concluding this chapter and revisiting the claims of Edwards's scholars, it's important to underline Edwards's overall orientation to questions of God's attributes and his relation to creation. Miscellany 1340 is an extended reflection on the relationship between reason and revelation. In it, Edwards is at pains to stress that we ought to expect to encounter mysteries, paradoxes, and seeming inconsistencies in our natural philosophy and in our accounts of spiritual things. Indeed, given that God is uncreated, self-existent, and infinitely above all others, "it would be very strange indeed if there should not be some great mysteries quite beyond our comprehension and attended with difficulties which it [is] impossible for us fully to solve and explain."[789] The notion of an unmade and unlimited Being is "all mystery, involving nothing but incomprehensible paradoxes and seeming inconsistencies." A self-existent Being is "utterly inconceivable." A being of infinite understanding, will, and power "must be omnipresent, without extension, which is nothing but mystery." Absolute immutability implies "duration without succession" is like saying an infinitely great duration all at once. Absolute immutability also entails that "there never arises any new act in God or new exertion of himself—and yet there arise new effects, which seems an utter inconsistence."[790] These great mysteries and paradoxes

[788] Schultz draws attention to John Gill's similar treatment of the same theme. Gill writes, "…a certain generation of men…have risen among us, who talk of the nature and fitness of things, by which God himself is bound, to which he conforms, and according to which he acts: though one would think, if this was the case, the nature and fitness of things should rather be called God." John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2002), 195; quoted in Schultz, "Supreme Self-Regard," 102. In other words, for Gill, God *is* the principle of proportionate regard. What a synthetic account of Edwards's theology adds to Gill is the trinitarian sub-current, which remains a sub-current throughout *End of Creation* because of Edwards's polemical aims and his attempt to discern what reason teaches on its own.

[789] *WJE* 23:371.

[790] *WJE* 23:372.

concerning God's existence and attributes are what accounts for our need of revelation from God, which while clarifying some mysteries and containing "many things plain and easy to be understood," especially in areas where it is most necessary for us to understand it, also contains many other incomprehensible mysteries, which will occupy the minds of the wisest and best of men to the end of the world. Thus, even as we read Edwards's carefully articulated views on God's attributes, God's freedom, and God's end in creation, we must keep in mind his felt recognition of the great and incomprehensible mysteries that attend all creaturely knowledge of God.

CHAPTER 9 REVISITING DIVINE FREEDOM AND CREATION'S NECESSITY

9.1 Introduction

With a clearer understanding of Edwards's taxonomy of attributes, his exposition of the will, and his view of God's relationship to what fitness requires, we are now in a position to evaluate the criticisms and challenges posed to Edwards's view of the God-world relation.

9.2 Is God Independent and Self-Sufficient?

We begin with the accusation that Edwards compromises God's psychological aseity. In an earlier section, we noted that Edwards's taxonomy of attributes enables him to avoid the conclusion that he compromises divine aseity in his account of the God-world relation. His references to dormant attributes in *End of Creation* do not make God dependent on creation, since God's capacity attributes are one sub-class of relative attributes, which are simply persons of the Trinity in various modes and relations. Likewise, negative attributes such as immutability, infinity, and eternity are modal and relative, since they depend for their intelligibility on the existence (whether actual or conceptual) of creation. Edwards's taxonomy of attributes enables us to avoid misunderstanding his references to potentially dormant attributes.

Additionally, the success of Edwards's taxonomy in accounting for both absolute divine aseity and self-sufficiency as well as the intelligibility of relative attributes depends upon denying God's real relation to creation.[791] As Aquinas (and the Reformed tradition) argued, the God-world relation is a mixed relation: the world's relation to God is real (since apart from God, the world cannot exist), but God's relation to the world is merely logical or conceptual. Crisp

[791] In his exploration of divine simplicity, Duby likewise deploys the absolute-relative distinction and the Thomistic notion of a mixed relation in order to show the compatibility of divine simplicity, *actus purus*, divine freedom, and creation's contingency. Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, vol. 30 of *T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 193–207.

argued that Edwards departed from this Thomistic pattern of thought, and instead affirmed that God has a real relation to creation. However, as we will see below, Crisp's argument for this Edwardsean departure depends upon his faulty account of God's essential creativity and creation's necessity.[792]

9.3 Is Edwards a Panentheist?

What do we make of the charges that Edwards is a panentheist who borders on Spinozan pantheism? In recent years, Walter Schultz has challenged the standard Neoplatonic accounts of Edward's panentheism. In particular, Schultz notes that Edwards clearly and unambiguously affirms a robust Creator-creature distinction. In *End of Creation*, two of his fundamental assumptions are the independence and self-sufficiency of God and creation *ex nihilo*. With respect to the first, God is "infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy."[793] He has no needs or lack and cannot be profited or hurt by his creatures. Edwards feels no need to demonstrate this aspect of God's nature, since it is universally acknowledged by all

[792] Crisp argues, "It appears that God is really related to the creation. For what is the created order but something akin to a motion picture projected from God ad extra that is an output of the essentially creative divine nature?" What's more, God "cannot be merely logically or conceptually related to what he creates because he is the immediate and necessary cause of what obtains." Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on God's Relation to Creation," *JESJ* 8.1 (2018): 12. Though normally a commitment to God's real relation to creation would compromise divine simplicity and aseity (since the world in some way makes God who he is), Crisp claims that Edwards avoids the traditional pitfall through his "exotic ontological picture" of the God-world relation.

In response, we may ask if there are any Christian theologians (and especially Reformed theologians) who deny that God is the immediate and necessary cause of creation. If not, then it is unclear how God's causation of creation necessitates a real relation. What's more, the notion that God projects the created order like a motion picture does not seem in itself to entail any real relation of God to creation, since this projection is not constitutive of God's being. The one aspect of Crisp's argument that would imply a real relation is the claim that God is essentially creative, which, as we will see, is not an accurate representation of Edwards's views. Given that Crisp's argument for Edwards's commitment to God's real relation to creation is an argument based solely on his reconstruction of Edwards's metaphysics, the significant flaws in his reconstruction render the claim of God's real relation to the world null. Apart from the assertions that God is essentially creative, that creation is necessary, and that creation is a shadowy projection of God's being, akin to his body, there is no ground for claiming that Edwards is committed to God's real relation to creation. His actual position is perfectly consistent with the classical notion that, while creation is really related to God (since God constitutes creation), God is only logically related to creation (since creation in no way constitutes God).

[793] *WJE* 8:420.

professing Christians (including the rationalists and deists that are his primary interlocutors).[794] With respect to the second assumption, the very notion of creation includes the notion of "perfect, absolute, universal derivation and dependence." Creation receives its existence entirely from God, out of nothing. Thus, creation cannot add anything to God. As a result, any notion of God's end in creation must respect God's absolute self-sufficiency and creation's absolute dependence upon God by virtue of creation *ex nihilo*.[795] These axiomatic assumptions must be kept in mind when considering Edwards's assertions that God is an all-comprehending being.

As we noted in chapter 7, God's omneity refers to the notion that he is an all-comprehending being. By this, he means that God is "the sum of all being,"[796] that "all things are in him, and he in all,"[797] and that he possesses "infinity and omneity." However, by this, he means that all other being is derived from and dependent upon him, so that no created being ever adds anything to God in an absolute sense.[798] What's more, Edwards is not unique in confessing that God is all. For example, Wollebius, in his compendium makes a similar claim in describing divine infinity. "God is altogether all, all in himself, all in all things, all in everything, and all out

[794] In his *Demonstration of the Existence and Attributes of God*, Samuel Clarke writes, "In particular, the supreme cause must in the first place be infinitely good, that is, he must have an unalterable disposition to do and to communicate good or happiness because, being himself necessarily happy in the eternal enjoyment of his own infinite perfections, he cannot possibly have any other motives to make any creatures at all but only that he may communicate to them his own perfection . . . There was indeed no necessity in nature that God should at first create such beings as he has created, or indeed any beings at all, because he is in himself infinitely happy and all-sufficient." Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84.

[795] Edwards's understanding of the absolute and total dependence of creation on God by virtue of creation *ex nihilo* must be kept in mind when considering his assertion (both in this treatise and in the Miscellanies) that God is an all-comprehending being. On which, see below.

[796] *WJE* 20:122.

[797] *WJE* 20:122.

[798] Wessling notes that Edwards's idealistic panentheism enables him to give a robust account of God's omnipresence that emphasizes both God's transcendence and his immanence, since "it is the divine mind that 'upholds' and 'stands beneath' all of (ideal) creation." Jordan Wessling, "Idealistic Pantheism: Reflections on Jonathan Edwards' Account of the God-World Relation," in *Idealism and Christian Theology*, vol. 1 of *Idealism and Christian Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 59–60.

of everything."[799] However, omneity does not entail pantheism, since creation is not made out of God, but made wholly *ex nihilo*.[800]

Much of the confusion surrounding Edward's panentheism stems from the mistaken identification of creation and emanation in Edwards's theology. For example, Crisp's claim that, according to Edwards, God is essentially creative depends upon Crisp's repeated identification of the act of creation with the act of emanation. However, in every instance where Crisp claims that Edwards's God is "essentially creative," he cites passages from *End of Creation* which describe God's disposition to *communicate* or *emanate* his fullness. This identification of creation and emanation is fundamentally flawed, and distorts Crisp's entire account of Edwards's theology.[801] For Edwards, creation and emanation are distinct acts of God.[802] Nowhere does Edwards equate or identify them. In *End of Creation*, emanation and communication are synonyms, as is the less-used diffusion.[803] And creation and communication/emanation are linked. As Schultz says,

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[799] Johannes Wollebius, "Compendium Theologiae Christinae," in *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 18.

[800] Schultz describes Edwards as an "intentional object panentheist." Walter Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," *JETS* 59.2 (2016): 356. In a subsequent article Schultz identifies and responds to numerous scholars who have wrongly interpreted Edwards as a kind of Neoplatonic emanationist and panentheist. Walter J. Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist? The Concept of Emanation in End of Creation," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 8.1 (2018): 27–35. Schultz's description of intentional object panentheism is similar to Wessling's idealistic panentheism. Wessling, "Idealistic Pantheism," 55–71.

[801] Schultz's treatment of this issue is exceptional. See Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 344–347. "The term 'emanation' (as a noun and a verb) appears sixty-three times in *End of Creation* and, with one exception, the term 'communication' (as a noun and a verb) appears seventy times as a synonym for 'emanation.' Creation and emanation are distinct concepts according to Edwards's usage of the terms in End of Creation. 'Creation' as a noun denotes a subordinate end. 'Emanation' as a noun denotes God's original ultimate end in creation, which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the redeemed, 'communicated' to them and 'diffused' among them by God. Thus, what is emanated truly is 'something of God.' In their verb form, each term denotes a distinct type of divine action. According to Edwards without exception, God's act of emanation is not an act of creation." See also Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 19–22. Crisp is aware of the awkwardness of affirming both creation as an emanation from God and creation *ex nihilo*. However, he believes that Edwards's immaterial antirealism provides a way to avoid any true inconsistency. See Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on God's Relation to Creation," 8–9.

[802] "Without exception, *creation* and *emanation* are distinct concepts with distinct referents." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 20.

[803] Schultz notes that emanation and its metaphors were common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the work of Cambridge Platonists. Normally, emanation is traced to the metaphysical monism of the Neoplatonists. See Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 18.

"Emanation is the end for which God created; creation is a subordinate end."[804] But they cannot be equated without severely misrepresenting Edwards's thought.[805]

The most common quotations that Crisp appeals to in support of his essential creativity thesis underscore the distinction between creation and emanation.[806] The disposition in God, which is an original property of his nature, is not a disposition to *creation*, but to an *emanation* of his own internal fullness. This internal fullness is his own knowledge, love, and delight in himself, which, as we saw in chapter 6, must be understood along trinitarian lines. Put another way, God's internal glory is the fullness of his triune life. It is a disposition to the emanation of his triune fullness that moves God to create, "so that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation."[807] Put another way, God does have a disposition to communicate his fullness, that is, to communicate his own knowledge, love, and joy. Creation is the determined way that he will gratify this disposition, not by *being* or *constituting* the emanation, but by being the occasion or appointed means that enables God to communicate his own fullness *ad extra*.[808]

Or again, Edwards writes "In a larger sense [God's love] may signify nothing diverse from that good disposition in his nature to communicate of his own fullness in general; as his

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[804] Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 346. Likewise, Schultz stresses that "ever since Pentecost both creation and emanation continue. Both are ongoing divine action." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 21.

[805] Schultz writes, "It is crucial for the sake of Edwards scholarship that this be settled, because so often what he says about communication in this section gets misrepresented as creation (both as a noun and as a verb), and once that error is in place others multiply." Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 345.

[806] This misidentification plagues Lee's account of Edwards as well.

[807] Schultz calls this "the most consistently misinterpreted passage from *End of Creation*." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 35.

[808] "It is said that God hath made all things for himself [Prov. 16:4], and in the Revelation [4:11] it is said, they are created for God's pleasure; that is, they are made that God may in them have occasion to fulfill his good pleasure, in manifesting and communicating himself. In this God takes delight, and for the sake of this delight God creates the world. But this delight is not properly from the creature's communication to God, but in his to the creature; it is a delight in his own act." *WJE* 13:496.

knowledge, his holiness, and happiness; and *to give creatures existence in order to it.*"[809] God's general love is not distinct from his disposition to communicate his fullness. God gives creatures existence (this is his act of creation *ex nihilo*) in order to *it* (this is a distinct act of communicating his fullness to those creatures who were made *ex nihilo*). Or again, consider the object of each verb: create and emanate. God creates the world. God emanates his own fullness.[810] In biblical terms, God's communication of his fullness simply is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the and among the redeemed, such that they partake of the divine nature, and share in God's own knowledge, love, and joy.[811] God's appointed means for making this communication possible is the creation of the world. Creation is the appointed location in and by which the communication happens, and intelligent creatures are those *toward whom* and *in whom* the communication is made. But it is the communication alone that is "something of God."[812] In other words, creatures are the vessels of divine glory, existing in its emanation, but they are not the emanation itself. We are the jars of clay which contain the treasure of God's glory in Christ.[813]

Put another way, any ascription of panentheism to Edwards must firmly reckon with all three of these Edwardsian claims about creation: (1) Creation is *in God* or in God's mind. (2) The emanation of God's fullness that is to and in his creatures is an emanation *ad extra*. (3)

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[809] *WJE* 8:438. As Schultz notes, "The 'it' refers to an emanation—a communication—of God's internal glory. God *creates* in order to *emanate*." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 25.

[810] So Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 347.

[811] So Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 25. "In at least three places Edwards' wording indicates that the emanation is 'in' the church. Thus, the emanation is the Holy Spirit."

[812] So Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 21. "What is being emanated truly is something of God, but it does not constitute creation." In other words, *what* is communicated is something of God. *To whom* it is communicated is the creature. *How* it is communicated is 1) *in* the manifestation of God's excellencies, 2) *in* the creature's understanding of God, and 3) *in* the creature's love and joy in God.

[813] Schultz thus concludes that Edwards cannot be a Neoplatonist, since Neoplatonism is metaphysically monistic and regards creation as an emanation. By contrast, for Edwards, "emanation as divine action falls under God's works of redemption, not creation." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 19–22. He further notes that Crisp's fundamental error is that he "makes a *spiritual* claim regarding the Holy Spirit into a *metaphysical* claim regarding the constitution of creation itself" (35).

Creation is *ex nihilo*.[814] In God, *ad extra*, and *ex nihilo*. All three qualify and restrain interpretations of the others. Any interpretation that uses one or more of these to deny or minimize the others is not adequately representing Edwards's thought. The notion that creation is in God or in his mind accents that there is no "space" or location outside or independent of God for creation to exist in. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). On the other hand, the phrase *ad extra* stresses a distinction between God's inner life and his communications outside of himself, so that creation is not conceived as a part of God. Finally, *ex nihilo* highlights that creation is not made out of God, as well as creation's universal derivation and dependence on God always and for everything.[815]

The distinction between creation and emanation, along with Edwards's insistence on God's absolute independence and creation *ex nihilo,* means that it is not true, as Crisp claims, that Edwards regards God as essentially creative. Instead, what we might say is that God is essentially communicative.[816] This means that he does have a disposition to communicate his

[814] "There is no 'place' for God to go to accomplish this 'display and communication,' since God's being comprehends and transcends absolute space. It can only occur locatively 'within' God. Thus, Edwards uses the Latin phrase *ad extra* primarily to indicate that the creatures which are involved in God's ultimate end are not of the same being as God. Rather, they are *ex nihilo*." Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards' End of Creation: An Exposition and Defense," *JETS* 49.1 (2006): 267.

[815] Wessling suggests that idealistic panentheism of the Edwardsian variety demands a significant revision of one's doctrine of God, especially in relation to divine simplicity and immutability. Wessling, "Idealistic Pantheism," 61. However, the fact that Edwards held to both an idealistic panentheism and to divine simplicity and immutability belies Wessling's suggestion. Wessling seems to err in regarding Edwards's idealistic panentheism as entailing that creation is a part of God. However, Edwards clearly rejects such a notion. Thus, it is unclear why a number of the problems Wessling poses to idealistic panentheism are not equally problems for classical theism.

[816] There is perhaps some equivocation in Wainwright's treatment of this question, on whom Crisp relies. On the one hand, Wainwright does distinguish creation and emanation in Edwards. "God's glory is indeed, 'Himself exerted and Himself communicated,' part of the 'fullness and completeness of himself.' But while His glory (i.e., God's communication of Himself *ad extra*) entails creation, it can't be identified with it. For one thing, the divine glory (consisting in the knowledge and love of God, and joy in Him) is communicated to some (the elect) and not others (the reprobate). For another, creation is merely the presupposition of the history of redemption in which God's internal fullness is diffused *ad extra*. God may or may not be identical with His glory, He isn't identical with creation." William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards, William Rowe, and the Necessity of Creation," ed. J. Jordan and D. Howard-Snyder (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1996), 124. On the other hand, creation's entailment in God's communication of himself seems to effectively collapse the distinction. "It follows from these assertions that God must diffuse His own fullness, that is, He *must* create" (123). Thus, for Wainwright, the necessity attending God's emanation extends to creation as well.

fullness. This disposition is an original property of his nature, because it is not properly distinct from, but is instead included in his own love for himself, which simply is the Holy Spirit. Thus, God's essential diffusiveness or communicativeness is fully realized in the internal processions of the Godhead. Then, given this essential communicativeness, it is *fitting* (Edwards's term) that God communicate his fullness *ad extra*, and, following from this, it is *fitting* that he would create the world to be the occasion for fulfilling this original disposition.

9.4 Is God Free?

The use of the term "fitting" naturally leads to the question of God's freedom.[817] Crisp is correct to note that Edwards rejects liberty of indifference in all of its forms, including as it is applied to God. God's will is necessarily determined, in all things, by what he sees to be fittest and best.[818] In that sense, Edwards is a compatibilist all the way down. This is why Crisp believes that Edwards's affirmation of the necessity of creation does not compromise the freedom of God.[819] Wainwright concurs, adding that, because of God's autonomy and independence, "compatibilist notions of freedom are more plausible with respect to God than creatures."[820] However, Edwards does not think that the compatibility of divine freedom with the moral necessity of God's will is only a Calvinistic doctrine. He cites Samuel Clarke, John Locke, and Andrew Baxter in support of this compatibility. Clarke argues that the supreme cause "must needs do always what is best in the whole," and that this necessity of fitness and wisdom is

[817] Fiering suggests that Edwards appropriated the notion of fitness from reading Samuel Clarke. See Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*, The Jonathan Edward Classic Studies Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 89–93.

[818] *WJE* 1:377.

[819] So Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Necessity of Creation," 127. "God can only do what is fittest and best. He is nonetheless free in the sense that He is aware of alternatives (the array of possible worlds), has the ability (i.e., the power and "skill") to actualize any of them, is neither forced, constrained, nor influenced by any other being, and does precisely what He wishes. Edwards believes that this is the only kind of freedom that is either relevant to moral agency or worth having."

[820] Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Necessity of Creation," 127.

"consistent with the greatest freedom, and most perfect choice."[821] Assuming that Edwards is endorsing Clarke's view by his quotation, it is significant that Clarke says the following:

> There was indeed no necessity in nature, that God should at first create such beings as he has created, or indeed any being at all; because he is in himself infinitely happy and all-sufficient. There was also no necessity in nature, that he should preserve and continue things in being, after they were created; because he would be self-sufficient without their continuance, as he was before their creation. But it was fit and wise and good, that infinite wisdom should manifest, and infinite goodness communicate itself; and therefore it was necessary, in the sense of necessity I am now speaking of, that things should be made at such a time, and continued so long, and indeed with various perfections in such degrees, as infinite wisdom and goodness saw it wisest and best that they should."[822]

Clarke thus adopts a distinction between a natural necessity and a fit or proper necessity. The former is a necessity of nature, whereas the latter is conceived in more aesthetic and moral terms: given the kind of being God is, it is fit that his wisdom and goodness should be manifested and communicated, and given the fitness of this general communication, it was necessary (in a kind of aesthetic or fitting sense) that God create and preserve the world according to his wisdom and goodness. Significantly, whereas Clarke implies that natural necessity is at odds with God's freedom, this fitting or aesthetic or moral necessity is not.

Likewise, Locke claims, "The freedom of the Almighty hinders not his being determined by what is best."[823] Baxter claims that God, "having all things always necessarily in view, must always, and eternally will, according to his infinite comprehension of things; that is, must will all things that are wisest and best to be done."[824] Indeed, "*it is the beauty of this necessity, that it is strong as fate itself, with all the advantage of reason and goodness."*[825]

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[821] *WJE* 1:377n2.
[822] *WJE* 1:377–378.
[823] *WJE* 1:378.
[824] *WJE* 1:379. Baxter denies that the divine will is "physically impelled," and instead asserts that "the divine will is determined by the eternal reason and aptitudes of things." That is, God by intuition sees the eternal relations of his the divine ideas, and is determined by the aptness of that relation. *WJE* 1:379.
[825] *WJE* 1:379, emphasis in original.

Thus, Crisp is correct in identifying Edwards's belief in the compatibility of moral necessity and divine freedom. However, it is equally important to note that Edwards did not see himself as unique in this respect; he believed that his opponents embraced this compatibility in some instances, while inconsistently denying it in others. Additionally, Crisp's analysis seems to ignore important distinctions that Edwards makes between fitness and necessity. In *End of Creation*, Edwards repeatedly speaks in the language of fitness, propriety, decency, and amiability, and not the language of necessity. His use of "necessary" and "necessity" in the treatise refer to logical deductions from definitions, not statements about God's act of creating.[826] While a full accounting of Edwards's understanding of fitness is beyond the scope of this project, in light of Miscellany 1062, *End of Creation*, and other places where Edwards's discusses fitness, we may make the following claims.

1) God does not create by a necessity of nature. In addition to the apparent endorsement of this sentiment in Clarke, in a sermon from 1734 on Hebrews 1:3, Edwards proposes a wide distinction between the eternal generation of the Son and the creation of the world. The creation of the world is "an arbitrary production." Eternal generation is a "necessary emanation."[827] God creates voluntarily, not "by necessity of nature," whereas the Son proceeds from the Father "naturally and necessarily, as brightness naturally proceeds from the Son."[828] Additionally, he

[826] Schultz notes that "there is nothing in Edwards's examples to indicate that a disposition must manifest." By the same token, God having a disposition to an emanation of his fullness, as an original property of his nature, implied and contained in his supreme regard for himself, "does not entail that God *must* create." Schultz, "The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards's End of Creation," 350.

[827] This early sermon testifies to the distinction between creation and emanation.

[828] Jonathan Edwards, "Jesus Christ is the Shining Forth of God's Glory" in Jonathan Edwards, *The Glory and Honor of God*, ed. Michael McMullen (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 228–229. The categories employed here appear to be identical to those of Turretin and Ames. Holmes concurs, citing this sermon in his exposition of *End of Creation.* "Edwards does not here identify the traditional distinction between necessary and appropriate acts of God that I have been using to expound his theology, but the underlying concept seems to be present, if not articulated." Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace & God of Glory: An Account Of The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards* (T&T Clark, 2000), 49n63. Elsewhere Holmes writes, "it is of the nature of God to beget the Son (and to spirate the Spirit); He could not be who He is without so doing. By contrast, it is merely God's good pleasure to create. He could not have done so, and His perfection would not have been altered or lessened in any way" (35).

suggest that it is up to God's pleasure "whether there should be any creation."[829] Thus, Edwards maintains that creation is an arbitrary but fitting act of God.

2) In some cases, fitness may require something of God without obligating something of God. Thus, the economic ordering of the persons of the Trinity for works *ad extra* is required by decency, even if God is not somehow ethically bound to order himself in such a way. Or, God operates according to the principle of proportionate regard as a description of his consistent pattern of behavior, without subordinating God to the principle as an external standard. In these cases, fitness seems to stand between total arbitrariness on the one hand, and absolute necessity on the other. Fitness implies some given pattern for acting, an absolute given which forms the standard by which subsequent voluntary actions are measured. For Edwards, that pattern for acting is always the internal processions of the Godhead. God's triune life simply is the beautiful, proportionate, and harmonious pattern for all of God's subsequent acts.

3) In some cases, fitness appears to be something that can only be known and identified after the fact, as well as something that allows for counterfactuals. Miscellany 1042 is highly significant in this regard. Speaking of the moral fitness of justification's dependence on faith, Edwards writes, "I don't mean such a fitness as obliged God in any sense, or such that it would have been an unfit, unworthy thing in God not to have promised justification to such: he might have required much more if he would, and if he had not been pleased to promise justification on these terms, the fitness would have signified nothing."[830] First, we see that fitness does not "oblige God in any sense."[831] Second, Edwards speaks in terms of counterfactuals with respect to

[829] *WJE* 25:147.

[830] *WJE* 20:382. Thus, fitness is distinct from necessity. On the other hand, note Miscellany 1346, where the necessity of a mediator for sinners is derived from God's concern for propriety and fitness. *WJE* 23:381–382.

[831] *WJE* 18:544. Miscellany 831 is significant in this respect. Edwards is responding to an objection to his view of justification by faith. The objection is that Edwards's view entails that faith's instrumentality for justification is grounded in nature "prior to any constitution of God," with the implication that God "could not fitly or suitably have done otherwise." Edwards responds first by noting that it is God's sovereign will and mere pleasure

God's establishment of the fitness between justification and faith. God "might have" required more than faith for justification, and if he had, the fitness of justification and faith would have "signified nothing." Thus, we know the fitness of justification and faith because God has actually promised justification to those that have faith. But, God was not obligated to do so, nor can some other arrangement be regarded as unfit, simply because God has been pleased to operate in the way that he has.

4) Edwards adopts some of the scholastic distinctions pertaining to necessity and liberty. For example, Turretin distinguished six types of necessity: (1) necessity of external coaction or compulsion, (2) internal, physical, and brute necessity, (3) dependent, hypothetical necessity based on God's decree (such as creaturely existence), (4) rational necessity by which the will irresistibly follows the judgment of the practical intellect, (5) moral necessity, or slavery to good or bad habits, and (6) necessity of the consequence by which a thing, when it exists, cannot but exist.[832] Edwards includes the first two under his notion of natural necessity and, like Turretin, regards them as incompatible with free choice. Edwards embraces a version of rational necessity when he says that the will is always as the greatest apparent good as perceived by the mind. Edwards forthrightly affirms moral necessity, and like Turretin, believes it is compatible with the

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that gave Christ to be our head and to suffer as our substitute and to obey the law for us, and that determined whether the Savior should be offered to all. These things being fixed by divine constitution, it is still God's arbitrary constitution that fixes how a particular person comes to have an interest in the Savior. But God's arbitrary constitution simply means that God is free from all obligation, indebtedness, and ties to justice, even as he is still directed by his own will and wisdom. What's more, though the determination of the way to salvation is determined wholly by God's arbitrary constitution, nevertheless Edwards suggests that there are some ways of salvation more fit than others, "more agreeable to things as thus already constituted," and thus faith is a more suitable instrument for granting us an interest in Christ than either our own virtue and righteousness or some other "wholly indifferent thing" without any moral goodness in it. A person who, "by a sincere act of his own heart unites and closes with Christ as his Head and Savior…is…on that account much more fitly and suitably to be looked upon as [Christ's]." In other words, for Edwards, God's prior arbitrary acts, directed by his will and wisdom, act as a pattern for subsequent acts in terms of their suitability and fitness.

[832] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 10.2.4, 320.

liberty necessary for moral responsibility.[833] The question is whether Edwards embraces hypothetical necessity (3) and the necessity of the consequence (6).

Muller argues that in his definitions in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards confuses the necessity of the consequence (which preserves space for true contingency) with the necessity of the consequent thing. According to Muller, Edwards uses the former term ("necessity of consequence or connection") but describes, in part, the latter concept, and in so doing closes off any possibility of creaturely contingence.[834] Helm identifies the same confounding of terms, but attributes it less to a confusion and more to a refusal of the distinction.

> In a system that is necessitarian in Edwards's sense, in which both the decree itself and what is decreed are necessary, there is no use for the distinction between the necessity of the consequence…and the necessity of the consequent…Or rather, this is a distinction without a difference. And so there is no use for Turretin's hypothetical necessity.[835]

Thus, according to Helm, Edwards "rides roughshod over the scholastic language."[836] This attitude towards some scholastic distinctions is characteristic of Edwards's approach in general. As we saw earlier, he rejects the distinction between indifference in the divided sense

[833] Fisk calls this "the freedom of perfection," and it is an essential aspect of Edwards's view of the will. Put simply, there is an inverse relationship between freedom and indifference. "The further a moral agent is removed from indifference, the freer he or she is." See Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn from the Classic-Reformed Tradition of Freedom of the Will* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 416. See also the discussion on 351–385.

[834] So Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 336–344.

[835] Paul Helm, "Francis Turretin and Jonathan Edwards on Contingency and Necessity," in *Learning from the Past: Essays on Reception, Catholicity, and Dialogue in Honour of Anthony N. S. Lane*, ed. Jon Balserak and Richard Snoddy (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 176. "Turretin affirms, but Edwards denies, that God has an alternative with what he may decree. For Edwards, there is no divine freedom in the sense that there is an alternative state of affairs that God could have had a good reason for choosing. So there is no hypothetical necessity, no events that are necessary only in virtue of the divine decree."

Elsewhere, Helm writes, "Muller thinks that Edwards has misunderstood the distinction. But an alternative view is that Edwards refuses to accept the distinction and deliberately disregards its language. Why would this be? I suggest that it is because God, according to Edwards, does not have the freedom of alternativity and so the distinction cannot be applied in respect of God's action, any more than (he thinks) it can be deployed in respect of human choice." Paul Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4.3 (2014): 292.

[836] Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," 292.

and indifference in the compound sense. In both cases, he likely regarded these as distinctions without a difference.

A similar situation obtains in Edwards's attitude toward contingence. Fisk notes that Edwards takes up Stapfer's arguments concerning the futurition of creation by virtue of God's decree, but avoids the use of the term contingency.[837] This is unsurprising, since, for Edwards, contingent either means "unforeseen" or it means "causeless" or "happening by chance." By either definition, there is no true divine contingence, since God foresees everything, and everything happens with a purpose. Thus, we may discern a common pattern in Edwards's appropriation of his Reformed scholastic heritage. Whether he's talking about necessity, contingence, or indifference, Edwards frequently simplifies and collapses some of the scholastic distinctions, while affirming and embracing others.[838]

At the same time, it is likely going too far to say, as Fisk does, that there is a tension in Edwards between the open and contingent view of reality espoused in his *Controversies* notebook (based on Stapfer) and the necessitarian line adopted in *Freedom of the Will*. Instead, I would suggest that just as notions like necessity of the consequence, contingence, and root of indifference provided the conceptual tools for the Reformed orthodox to steer a middle course between the Scylla of randomness and chance and the Charybdis of absolute necessitarianism, so Edwards's notion of fitness and decency—as distinct from absolute necessity of nature and as a

[837] Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 262. Fisk notes that Edwards selects quotations from Stapfer that are helpful to his cause, while passing over others that express views with which Edwards disagrees (237).

[838] As Fisk says, Edwards "defines terms of art in a non-classic manner." Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards's Turn*, 235. Edwards uses the same terms, but "gives those terms of art his own meaning, according to what he considers to be the common or vulgar idiom of his day" (236).

descriptive way of describing what God has done in light of the beauty of his triune life—allows him to steer a similar middle course between absolute necessity and arbitrary chance.[839]

At the very least, it is highly misleading to suggest that Edwards regards creation as necessary *simpliciter*. His repeated and deliberate use of "fit, amiable, and proper" should lead us to moderate the language of necessity as applied to God's decision to create. A more accurate rendering of Edwards's thought on creation is to say that, given God's love for himself, and given God's disposition to communicate his fullness, it is fitting that God create a world so that he might accomplish the communication of his fullness *ad extra*.[840]

Moreover, when it comes to discussions of necessity and fitness in relation to God's will, we must keep in mind Edwards's insistence that any discussion of the modes and action and operation of the powers of the divine mind is fraught with peril, owing to the inadequacy of human thought and language, and the incomprehensibility of "the first Being, who is self-existent, independent, of perfect and absolute simplicity and immutability and the first cause of all things." The result is that Edwards is cautious about describing God's freedom to create with precision. Instead, he describes what it is *not* and what it is *consistent with*. It does not consist in liberty of indifference, since liberty of indifference is inherently contradictory, nor does it

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[839] A fruitful avenue for comparison of Edwards's understanding of fitness may be found in Anselm's understanding of fitness and necessity as articulated in his *Cur Deus Homo?* On this, see Jonathan S. McIntosh, "God, Creator of His Own Necessity: The Logic of Divine Action in Anselm's Cur Deus Homo," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 13.1 (2017): 68–81.

[840] So Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 101. Strobel argues that God wills "to exercise his attributes in emanating himself in creation in a way that is fitting but not necessary." "God does not have to create as such…but his emanation is fully actualized in his own life, and it is fitting that his emanation flow forth ad extra."

See also, Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 75–104. Schultz claims that "Edwards's two-tiered dispositional account of God's motivation does not support the inference that God must emanate." Schultz, "Is Jonathan Edwards a Neoplatonist?," 29. Moreover, it avoids the problem of single-tiered dispositional accounts, such as those that operate on the Dionysian principle that "goodness must diffuse itself." However, Schultz also notes that "exactly how Edwards' view of God's freedom in *End of Creation* compares and contrasts with what Edwards wrote in *Freedom of the Will* deserves more careful scholarly attention" (34).

involve natural necessity, as though creation is necessary in itself. On the other hand, it is consistent with moral necessity, by which God always acts according to his supreme wisdom which directs him to do what is fittest and best.[841]

9.5 Is This the Best (and Therefore Only) Possible World?

Finally, Edwards's insistence that God always does what is best accents a conundrum that may be adduced in the Reformed tradition concerning God's freedom to create. In the classical Reformed tradition, discussions of God's choice to create this world accented the contingence of this world and God's liberty of indifference, by which he was able to create otherwise than he did. These concepts protected God's choice from charges of randomness on the one hand and fatalism on the other. By contrast, Edwards dispensed with the categories of contingence and liberty of indifference, and instead took up and accented categories of fitness and moral necessity by which God always does what is fittest and best to be done. Significantly, he pressed the category of moral necessity into every decision that God makes, arguing that every choice between alternatives includes a preferableness of one to another, a best choice which God's infinite wisdom and rectitude discerns and selects. It is this insistence on God's moral necessity and its applicability to every decision that highlights the conundrum.

When Edwards moves from the language of "fitness" to the language of "best" (as he does in *Freedom of the Will*), he immediately introduces a notion of comparison between what

[841] "For Edwards, God always chooses what is 'wisest and best.' Edwards enlists, not Stapfer, but the support of Samuel Clarke, Andrew Baxter, and John Locke for the doctrine of divine freedom of perfection. That is, God is always determined in his volitions by what is wisest and best. The greater the determination, the greater the perfection, the freer God is, and the further is he removed from any kind of indifference." Philip J. Fisk, "The Tension between Jonathan Edwards's 'Controversies' Notebook and Freedom of the Will on Whether Reality Is Open and Contingent," in *The Global Edwards Papers*, ed. Rhys S. Bezzant, Australian College of Theology Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, 2017), 133. However, while Fisk claims that Edwards rejects Stapfer, it is worth noting that Stapfer himself described God's wisdom as a norm for God's attributes and actions, and thus, because God always does what is most agreeable to his ends, we are justified in regarding this world as the best possible one.

God does and what God might have done. This comparison conceptually externalizes God's possibilities and thus, by virtue of his moral necessity (by which he must do what is best), necessity seems to act as a constraint upon God, since there are now numerous possible avenues (the not-best worlds) closed off to him.

Put another way, conceiving of possibility in terms of an infinite array of divine ideas, coupled with God's moral necessity (he always does what is best) appears to make something that is given for God (the best possible world) a constraint on his action. He is surveying possibilities and discovering or finding the one that is best. Having found it, he must create it *and only it.* This then raises questions about whether the never-to-be-created possibles are in fact possible at all. If possibility is defined by God's creative power, and if God's creative power is always in accord with his perfect wisdom and rectitude such that he cannot will logical contradictions, nor can he will moral repugnancies, then in what sense are second best worlds "possible"? For God to create a second best world would seem to violate the moral necessity by which he always does what is best. This results in both logical and moral absurdities, since the God who always does what is best is apparently able to do what is second best. Thus, it appears that second best worlds are not create-able, and thus are not possible.

We may summarize the dilemma in this way.

1. For Edwards, like the tradition, possibility is defined by God's power, which excludes logically and morally repugnant choices.
2. When choosing among alternatives, God always acts as directed by superior fitness and infinite wisdom. He always does what is best.
3. For God, acting according to superior fitness is a moral necessity. He *must* do what is best.
4. Thus, it is morally necessary for God to choose the best possible world.
5. Therefore, God cannot choose the second best world because it would be unfit for him to do so.
6. Therefore, second best worlds are not create-able, and thus not possible, just as it is impossible for God to make a square circle or to create a world in which he can lie.

7. The seemingly unavoidable conclusion is that, not only is this the *best* possible world, it is the *only* possible world.

My own sense in reading Edwards is that, though he never expressly articulates this dilemma, he is aware of it. He recognizes the implication of his thought—that uncreated possibles cannot be truly possible because they are morally repugnant, given 1) God's moral necessity (doing what is fittest and best), and 2) all possible choices can be ranked or compared.[842] Thus, he only rarely and indirectly says that this is the best possible world, since, given his other commitments, it would render it the only possible world, and thus overturn his entire inherited conceptual framework for conceiving of divine power and possibility.[843] Instead, Edwards is content to live in the tension, focusing his efforts on overthrowing alternative views of God's freedom (such as those of his Arminian opponents), showing what divine freedom is *not* and what it is *consistent with*, as well as relying on his mediating notion of fitness to avoid

[842] Crisp identifies the same feature of Edwards's thought, even if he attributes it more directly to Edwards than is warranted. See Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146. On the other hand, Bombaro contends that Edwards has no use for possible world semantics. "But for Edwards the idea of other possible worlds is simply an exercise in sophistry. Questions about 'best possible worlds' are red herrings that shift emphasis away from God to man, from the entire scheme of things to the individual…Deviating from a theocentric perspective on the world to investigate other 'possibilities' only casts aspersions on, first, God's absolute sovereignty and secondly, His omnisapience." John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 172 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 89.

[843] In his *Book of Controversies*, Edwards writes, "But it is demonstrably true that if God sees that good will come of it, and more good than otherwise, so that, when the whole series of events is viewed by God, and all things balanced, the sum total of good with the evil is more than without—all being subtracted that need to be subtracted, and added that is to be added—I say, if the sum total of good, thus considered, be greatest, greater than the sum without it, then it will follow that God, if he be a wise and holy Being, must will it.

For if this sum total that has the evil in it, when what the evil subtracts is subtracted, has yet the greatest good, then 'tis the best sum total, better than the sum total that has no evil in it. But if, all things considered, it be really the best, how can it be otherwise, than that it should be chosen by an infinitely wise and good Being, whose holiness and goodness consist in always choosing what is best? Which does it argue most—wisdom or folly, a good disposition or an evil one—when two things are set before a being, the one better and the other worse, to choose the worse and refuse the better?" *WJE* 27.

Miscellany 749 contains a similar sentiment: "In an efficient cause's disposing things for a final cause, it appears that things not actually in being are present with it, but present with it so as to determine it in acting; just as intelligent beings are determined by choice, and by a wise choice, rejecting the bad and choosing the good, and choosing the good with admirable distinction, choosing the best in millions of cases out of an infinite variety that are equally possible, and equally before this cause. It argues perception in the cause that thus selects the best out of infinite numbers in all cases, though the cases are as it were infinite [in] number, because 'tis good that governs the determination of this cause; but things are neither good nor bad but only with relation to perception." *WJE* 18:395.

hard necessitarianism and irrationalism and thus preserving a category of non-obligatory suitability for God's actions.

CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

The present study has sought to explore the contested grounds of Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of God and creation through the lens of his taxonomy of attributes. In this concluding chapter, my aim is to summarize and recapitulate the argument as a whole. I will do so in three ways. First, I will review each chapter, identifying the central claims of each and its contribution to the whole. Second, using Oliver Crisp's summary of Edwards's metaphysics as a foil, I will articulate my own understanding of Edwards's account of the God-world relation. Finally, I will present a brief summary account of Edwards's view of the structural moments moving from God's absolute and immanent life to his action in creation.

10.1 Review of Chapters

Part 1 focused specifically on Edwards's understanding of divine simplicity, attribute distinctions, and the Trinity. Chapter 1 set forth the basic parameters of the debate among Edwards's scholarship concerning his acceptance, modification, or rejection of divine simplicity. It further examined the doctrine of divine simplicity in its medieval and Reformed scholastic articulations. Leaning on the work of Richard Muller and Steven Duby, I explored the fundamental claim of divine simplicity as the denial of composition in God, and then sought to understand the various distinctions proposed by Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, Ames, Turretin, and Mastricht in accounting for both attribute distinctions and distinctions between the divine persons and the essence, and between the persons themselves. The main contribution of this chapter was to establish that while the tradition is united in its denial of composition to God, it permitted great variety in speaking of other kinds of distinctions to exposit the divine essence and the persons according to our way of conceiving.

Chapter 2 explored Edwards's understanding of divine simplicity as reflected in his

miscellanies, sermons, and treatises. I argued that throughout his life, Edwards repeatedly, clearly, and unremarkably affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity as it was passed to him through the Reformed orthodox tradition. Edwards forthrightly embraces the truths that everything that is in God is God, that God is a simple, pure act, and that God is indivisible and devoid of parts.

Chapter 3 unfolded the historical background of Edwards's *Discourse on the Trinity*, highlighting the subordinationism of Samuel Clarke as the key polemical context for understanding Edwards's argumentation. Additionally, this chapter situated Edwards's use of the psychological analogy for the Trinity against the backdrop of the variety of approaches to this analogy among the Reformed scholastics. Edwards employs a strong psychological account of the Trinity, in which the likeness between human minds and the divine mind is theologically load-bearing.

Chapter 4 was the capstone of Part 1, in which I offered an extended exposition of Edwards's *Discourse on the Trinity*. Edwards offers a strong psychological account of the Trinity utilizing four fundamental axioms which he shares with anti-Trinitarians such as Samuel Clarke. These axioms are 1) God is infinitely happy; 2) God is a person who has understanding and will; 3) God is simple pure act; and 4) the persons of the God mutually indwell each other such that they are predicable of one another. In his exposition of the Trinity, Edwards distinguishes the persons using a psychological account of the Trinity, maintains the unity of the Godhead through divine simplicity, and preserves the personhood of each person through perichoresis.

Part 2 moved from focusing on the absolute and immanent life of God to exploring God's attributes and the God-world relation. Chapter 5 surveyed key attribute classification systems among the Reformed scholastics, highlighting in particular the absolute-relative distinction, the

communicable-incommunicable distinction, the classification based on the ways of knowing God, and the essence-intellect-will distinction. Additionally, this chapter explored how attribute classifications worked themselves out in the thought of Francis Turretin and William Ames on divine power, knowledge, and will.

Chapter 6 identified Edwards's own systems of attribute classification. In particular, Edwards distributed God's attributes according to divine faculties (understanding and will), yielding the distinction between moral and natural attributes that correlates with his psychological account of the Trinity. Edwards also distinguishes attributes based on whether they are really in God, or whether they are only attributed to him in relation to his creation. Within God's relative attributes, Edwards also distinguished negative attributes and capacity attributes. Finally, in a unique move, Edwards correlated these attribute distinctions such that all of God's perfections can be reduced to persons of the Godhead.

Chapter 7 demonstrated the outworking of Edwards's classification systems by surveying select attributes of God and showing both Edward's traditionalism in his articulation of individual attributes, as well as how his taxonomy treated divine power, knowledge, and the decree. In particular, we saw that it is the decree of God that refracts the real attributes into the myriad of relative attributes which enable God's creatures to truly know him.

Chapter 8 introduced significant claims and accusations about Edwards's view of the God-world relation. In particular, many scholars claim that Edwards held that God is essentially creative and that creation is necessary. Moreover, some have claimed that Edwards parted ways with the Reformed orthodox tradition on the question of divine freedom. These claims led naturally to a discussion of Reformed scholastics on divine freedom and necessity, as well as an exploration of Edwards on the will, on God's freedom, and the key Edwardsean category of

fitness and decency. This chapter demonstrated that whereas the Reformed tradition navigated divine freedom using various kinds of necessity, contingence, and the liberty of indifference, Edwards collapses certain kinds of necessity, narrows and rejects any notion of contingence with respect to God, and rejects all forms of the liberty of indifference as incoherent. Thus, his account of divine freedom, while similar to the Reformed orthodox tradition, operates with slightly different conceptual tools.

Chapter 9 evaluated Edwards's view of the God-world relation in light of the criticisms leveled against it by Oliver Crisp and others. I contended that, contrary to Crisp's claim, Edwards does not believe that God is essentially creative or that creation is a necessary emanation from God. The result was a clarification on Edwards's panentheism, in which creation is in God's mind and *ex nihilo*, and provides the occasion for the communication of God's triune fullness *ad extra.* Finally, I noted the conundrum created by Edwards's view of God's moral necessity, in which it begins to appear that not only is this the best possible world, but potentially the only possible world. I argued that Edwards is content to live in this tension, utilizing his fitness as a descriptive pattern for God's actions which is a mediating category between a hard necessitarianism on the one hand, and total irrationality and causelessness on the other.

10.2 Modifying Oliver Crisp

Given the importance of the scholarship of Oliver Crisp on Edwards's view of God and creation, it is fitting to summarize my own argument by showing the similarities and differences between them.

Crisp (from *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*)[844]

P1. The world exists 'in' God. (Core thesis.)

[844] Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142–144.

P2. God is not the world. God and the world are distinct entities. (The antipantheism thesis.).
P3. God is essentially creative. He must create a world because it is his nature to create a world. He is 'disposed' to create a world. (The essential divine creativity thesis.)
P4. Although it is radically contingent on divine fiat, this world is the necessary product of God's essential creativity. (The necessity of creation thesis.)
P5. The world is created by eternal divine fiat, though it begins to exist in time. (The eternal creation thesis.)
P6. God must create the best possible world. (The best possible world thesis.)
P7. The created world is ideal; it exists in the divine mind. (The immaterial antirealist thesis.)
P8. God continuously creates the world ex nihilo. God eternally decrees that no created thing persists through time; each 'moment' of creation is numerically distinct from the previous one; God constitutes these many world-stages as one four-dimensional entity, namely, 'the world' (i.e., the created order). (The four-dimensionalist continuous creation thesis.)
P9. God is the sole causal agent, that is, the efficient cause of all that comes to pass. (The occasionalism thesis.)

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P1. According to our way of conceiving, the world exists both "in" God and *ad extra*. (Core thesis.)
P2. God is not the world. God and the world are distinct entities. (The antipantheism thesis.).
P3. It is fitting, but not necessary, that God communicate or emanate his internal trinitarian fullness outside of himself.
P4. Creation is radically dependent on divine fiat and a fitting means for accomplishing God's goal of communicating himself *ad extra*.
P5. The decree to create the world is an eternal decree, though the world itself begins to exist with time.
P6. God operates according to (but not in submission to) the principle of proportionate regard, and therefore he always does that which is most fit.
P7. The created world is ideal; it exists in the divine mind, but is extra-mental with respect to human minds. (The immaterial realist thesis.)
P8. God continuously creates the world ex nihilo. The world is radically dependent on God at every stage of its existence. The persistence of the world through time is owing solely to God's sovereign constitution, according to his own established method.
P9. God is the primary causal agent, that is, the efficient cause of all that comes to pass, whereas there are numerous secondary causes operating under God's sovereign government. (The semi-occasionalism thesis.)[845]

[845] Though a discussion of Crisp's account of Edwards's continuous creationism and occasionalism is beyond the scope of this project, I will note that I believe Crisp misreads Edwards in some key ways on these points. In particular, it is not true that Edwards denies created identity across time, nor that he regards the persistence of the

8.3 Restating Edwards's Account

In the introduction I noted that this project is an attempt to understand the meaning and significance of the following two quotations.

> So divines make a distinction between the natural and moral perfections of God: by the moral perfections of God, they mean those attributes which God exercises as a moral agent, or whereby the heart and will of God are good, right, and infinitely becoming, and lovely; such as his righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness; or, in one word, his holiness. By God's natural attributes or perfections, they mean those attributes, wherein, according to our way of conceiving of God, consists, not the holiness or moral goodness of God, but his greatness; such as his power, his knowledge whereby he knows all things, and his being eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, his omnipresence, and his awful and terrible majesty.[846]

> It is a maxim amongst divines that everything that is in God is God, which must be understood of real attributes and not of mere modalities. If a man should tell me that the immutability of God is God, or that the omnipresence of God and authority of God [is God], I should not be able to think of any rational meaning of what he said. It hardly sounds to me proper to say that God's being without change is God, or that God's being everywhere is God, or that God's having a right of government over creatures is God. But if it be meant that the real attributes of God, viz. his understanding and love, are God,

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world as illusory. Edwards does not deny identity across time. Rather, he asserts that the *only* identity across time is that which depends on God's sovereign constitution. Crisp claims that "God makes it *appear* that there is action across time." Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 74. But that is not what Edwards says. Edwards asserts that God makes it *true* that there is action across time.

> Thus it appears, if we consider matters strictly, there is no such thing as any identity or oneness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends *on God's sovereign constitution.* And so it appears, that the objection we are upon, made against a supposed divine constitution, whereby Adam and his posterity are viewed and treated as one, in the manner and for the purposes supposed, as if it were not consistent with truth, because no constitution can make those to be one, which are not one; I say, it appears that this objection is built on a false hypothesis: for it appears, that a divine constitution is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature. *WJE* 3:404.

In other words, Crisp does not take with full seriousness Edwards's insistence that God "makes truth in affairs of this nature."

With respect to his occasionalism, Crisp fails to note the numerous places in Edwards where he affirms a belief in "second" or mundane causality, thus, undermining Crisp's claim that God is the only causal agent: WJE 1:156–57, 451; 2:208; 5:145; 6:49; 13:478; 14:33, 214, 220; 17:26, 97, 359, 365, 409, 422; 18:89, 157; 19:77, 466; 20:327–28; 21:57, 304; 23:207, 242; 24:235; 25:64,90, 274, 288; 26:205. Thus, his view is better regarded as a semi-occasionalism. On these issues, seeS. Mark Hamilton, *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards, Continuous Creation and Christology*, vol. 1 of *A Series of Treatises on Jonathan Edwards* (JESociety Press, 2017); Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 51–96.

[846] *WJE* 2:255.

then what we have said may in some measure explain how it is so: for Deity subsists in them distinctly, so they are distinct divine persons.[847]

My argument has been that Edwards categorizes attributes along two axes: trinitarian distinctions understood in terms of a psychological account of God, and the Creator-creature distinction. Edwards embraces a radicalized version of the absolute-relative distinction, weds it to a psychological account of the Trinity which yields a distinction between natural and moral attributes.

	Person	**Real Attributes**	**Relative Attributes**
Natural Attributes	Father	Being / Life	Negative: Infinity, Eternality, Omnipresence, Immutability, Simplicity Positive: Majesty, Greatness, Omnipotence (Capacity)
Natural Attributes	Son	Idea / Knowledge	Positive: Omniscience, Wisdom (Capacity)
Moral Attributes	Holy Spirit	Will / Love / Joy / Holiness	Positive (Capacity): Grace, Mercy, Faithfulness, Righteousness, Retributive Justice, Wrath

This understanding of attributes yields the following account of God's creation of the world, presented in the form of distinct structural moments, according to our way of conceiving.

1) God in himself is infinitely and unchangeably happy and perfect. He has infinite and unwavering self-knowledge and self-delight. God generates the Son through his own self-reflection, and spirates the Spirit through the mutual delight between the Father and the Son. Thus, God knows himself in his perfect image in the Son, and loves himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of union between the Father and Son. The distinctions between God, his idea, and his love are the only absolute or real distinctions

[847] *WJE* 21:132.

in God, or his only real attributes. Each of these attributes is God himself, since everything that is in God is God. Moreover, each of these is a distinct person, since each of them has understanding and will by virtue of their ineffable mutual indwelling. Additionally, God not only loves himself in the Holy Spirit, but he also loves his Trinitarian fullness. This self-knowledge and self-love is eternally and fully active and occurrent.

2) An aspect of his supreme self-regard (according to our way of conceiving) is his disposition to communicate himself *ad extra*. This disposition is an original property of his nature and is not properly distinct from his self-love. God is thus inclined to share his internal fullness. As a result of this inclination or motive, God intends to communicate his fullness *ad extra*. Given who God is in his triune life, God's intention to communicate his fullness *ad extra* is fitting, decent, and appropriate. The communication of God's trinitarian fullness is his original ultimate end.

    As a part of this intent to communicate his fullness ad extra, God orders himself into an economy or society for this purpose. Fitness requires (but does not oblige) that the intended missions of the persons follow the processions of the persons. The economic Trinity ought to reflect and reveal the immanent Trinity.

3) Given his inclination and intent to communicate his fullness, it is fitting that God would create a world as the determined way of accomplishing the communication of his internal glory. Creation is a means to the end of God's communication and emanation of his fullness. Creation is a fitting way to accomplish God's original ultimate end. Infinite wisdom directs his will, such that God always does that which is fittest and best, and thus God decrees to create. Creation is thus not naturally necessary, but is morally necessary.

4) God creates this particular world as the best and most fitting way to communicate his fullness. Divine ideas, understood as aspects of God's self-knowledge as refracted by possible creations, establish the domain of pure possibility. From this array of possible worlds, God chooses this world to create, as he is directed by his infinite wisdom and rectitude. God's decree to create gives rise to relative attributes, as real attributes (the divine persons) are brought into relation to God's intended creation. Thus, we may now meaningfully speak of natural attributes (such as power, knowledge, eternity, majesty) and his moral attributes (such as righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness), or, dividing them in a slightly different fashion, we may speak of capacity attributes (such as power, wisdom, faithfulness, and mercy) and negative attributes (such as infinity, eternality, immutability, and simplicity).
5) Our understanding of the divine Trinity, the divine attributes, and the God-world relation will always contain much mystery and seeming paradox, owing to our finitude, to the limitations of human language, and to the sublimity of the subject. God is infinite and incomprehensible to created minds, and thus all of our rational efforts to grow in knowledge of God must be guided supremely by divine revelation. Nevertheless, the effort to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, by reasoning within the bounds of Scripture, is a worthwhile endeavor, that not only brings us joy, but in the process also fulfills the end for which God created the world.

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